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FOLK TALES  
OF  
ORISSA

SHANTI MOHANTY



STERLING PUBLISHERS (P) LTD.  
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## **FOLK TALES OF ORISSA**

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## **GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION**

Folklore in the different parts of India is a rich legacy for us. While researches in ancient and modern history have been directed in recent decades more to the succession of kings and political shifts not much notice has been paid to the culture, complex traditions and social beliefs of the common people. The sociologists have also to pay a good deal of attention to the customs and beliefs of the people and changes therein through the ages. They have rather neglected the study of folklore which is a reliable index to the background of the people. There has always been an easy mobility of folklore through pilgrimages, *melas* and fairs. The wandering minstrels, *sadhus* and *fakirs* have also disseminated them. People of the North visiting the temples of the South and *vice versa* carry their folk-tales, songs, riddles and proverbs with them and there is an inconspicuous integration. The *dharamsalas*, inns and the *Chattis* (places of rest where the pilgrims rest and intermingle) worked as the clearing house for the folk tales, traditional songs and riddles. That is why we find a somewhat common pattern in folk literature of different regions. The same type of folk tale will be found in Kashmir and in Kerala with slight regional variation. These stories were passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth before they came to be reduced to writing.

Folklorists have different approaches to the appreciation of folklore. Max Muller has interpreted the common pattern in folk literature as evidence of nature-myths. Sir L. Gomme thought that a historical approach is the best for the study of folklore. But Frazer would rather encourage a commonsense approach and to him, old and popular folk literature is mutually interdependent and satisfies the basic curiosities and instincts of man. That folklore is a vital element in a living culture has been underlined in recent years by scholars like Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown.

It is unfortunate that the study of folklore in India is of very recent origin. This is all the more regrettable because the *Panchatantra* stories which had their origin in Bihar had spread through various channels almost throughout the world. As late as in

1859, T. Benfey had held that there is an unmistakable stamp of Indian origin in most of the fairy tales of Europe. The same stories with different twists or complexes have come back to us through Grimm and Aesop and the retold stories are greedily swallowed by our children. That India has neglected a proper study of the beautiful motifs of our folk tales is seen in the fact that the two large volumes of the dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend published by Messrs Funk and Wagnalls and Company of New York have given a very inadequate reference to India.

What is the secret of the fascination of the folk tales that the old, the young and children are kept enthralled by their recitals ? The same story is often repeated but does not lose its interest. The secret is the satisfaction that our basic curiosity finds in the folk tales. The folk tales through fantasies, make-belief and complacent understanding help primitive man to satisfy his curiosity about the mysteries of the world and particularly the very many inexplicable phenomena of nature around him. We have an element of primitiveness in our mind in spite of the advancement of science around us. Even a scientist finds great delight in the fairy tales of the moon being attacked as the origin of the lunar eclipse. Through the folk tales man exercised his once-limited vision and somehow or the other we would like to retain that limited vision even when we have grown up. The advancement in science can never replace the folk tales. On the other hand, folk tales have helped the scientific curiosity of men. In spite of the scientific explanation as to why earthquakes take place, the old, the young and children would still be delighted to be told that the world rests on the hood of a great snake and when the snake is tired with its weight, it shakes the hood and there is an earthquake. Among the Mundas, an aboriginal tribe in Bihar, there is a wonderful explanation of the constellation Orion. The sword and belt of Orion, the Mundas imagined, form their appropriate likeness to the plough and plough-share which the supreme *Sing Bonga* God first shaped in the heavens and then taught people on earth how to use the plough and the plough-share. It is further said in the Munda folk tale that while the *Sing Bonga* was shaping the plough and the plough-share with a chisel and a hammer he observed a dove hatching its eggs at a little distance. The *Sing Bonga* threw his hammer at the dove to

bag the game. He missed his mark and the hammer went over the dove's head and hung on a tree. The hammer corresponds to the Pleiads which resembles a hammer. The Aldebaran is the dove and the other stars of Hyades are the eggs of the dove. Any illiterate Munda boy will unmistakably point out these star groups.

Weather and climate have their own stories and are often connected with particular stages of the crops. The wet season and the hottest month are intimately associated with the ripening of crops or the blossoming of trees or the frequency of dust storms and stories are woven round them. But nothing is more satisfying as a folk story than the explanation of the phases of the stars, moon and the sun. A Munda would point out the milky way as the *Gai Hora* i.e. the path of the cows. The *Sing Bonga* God leads his cows every day along this path—the dusky path on the sky is due to the dust raised by the herd. The dust raised by the cows sends down the rains. A story of this type can never fail to sustain its interest in spite of all the scientific explanation of the astral bodies.

The "why and therefore" of the primitive mind tried to seek an answer in the surrounding animal and plant kingdom. Animals are grouped into different categories according to their intelligence and other habits. The fox is always sly while the cow is gentle. The lion and the tiger have a majestic air while the horse is swift, sleek and intelligent. The slow-going elephant does not forget its attendant nor does he forget a man that teases him. Monkeys are very close to man. The peacock is gay while the crow is shrewd. The tortoise is slow-going but sure-footed. The hare is swift but apt to laze on the road. The primitive mind has enough intelligence to decipher these inherent characteristics of the common animals he meets. Similarly, when he sees a large and shady peepal tree he naturally regards it as the abode of the sylvan god. The thick jungle with its trees and foliage is known to be frequented by thieves and dacoits. Any solitary hut in the heart of the forest must be associated with someone unscrupulous or uncanny. These ideas are commonly woven into stories and through them the primitive mind seeks to satisfy the eternal why and how of the mind. Folk literature is often crude and even grotesque. The stories of the witches and the ogres come in this category. There is nothing to be surprised

at that. They reflect the particular stage of the development of the human mind and also are a projection of the beliefs and fads of the mind. Scientific accuracy should never be looked for in folk tales although folk tales are a very good reflex of the social developments of a particular time.

It is enough if the basic ideas regarding the animal and plant kingdom still satisfy that the donkey is dense or stupid and the snake typifies slyness and the fox is deceitful. These ideas repeated in ancient folk tales have stood the test of time and this would show that the primitive mind was not foolish or credulous. The very idea that the folk tales have woven man, nature, animal and plant creation together shows the great flight of imagination and a singular development of mind. Introduction of moral lessons or any dogma was not done as an after-thought but came in as a very natural development.

The last source of the folk tales is human society itself. The elemental moorings that are at the root of human society are sought to be illustrated in folk tales. The day-to-day life of the common man finds its full depiction in the folk tales. Parental love, family happiness, children's adventurous habits, love and fear of the unknown, greed etc. are some of the usual themes of folk tales. The common man yearns for riches and comforts he cannot usually look for. He dreams of riches, princes, kingdoms etc. and finds satisfaction in stories of fantasy. Men love gossip and scandal. Women cannot keep secrets, children will love their parents, a mother-in-law will always think the daughter-in-law needs to be told what to do—these are some of the basic ideas that make up much of our daily life. The folk tales are woven round them and whether fantastic or with a moral undertone they only reflect the daily chores, tears and joys of the common man.

Unknowingly, the folklorists bring in the religious customs, beliefs, food habits, modes of dress, superstitions etc. and thereby leave a picture of the culture-complex of the region and its people. A tribal story does not picture a king riding a white big foaming horse followed by hundreds of other horsemen going for a *shikar*. In a tribal story the Raja will be found cutting the grass and bringing back a stack of it to feed his cows, but a folk tale more current in urban areas will have large palaces, liveried-servants, ministers and courtiers in the king's court. All this only means that the time and the venue of the origin of the stories are widely different. It

is here that the sociologists and the anthropologists come in useful. As life is different in rural and urban areas or is chequered with goodness or badness in the world so is folk literature diversified, as it must be, being a replica of life.

It is a pity that these beautiful folk tales in India were almost on the point of disappearance when a few pioneers mostly consisting of foreign missionaries and European scholars looked into them and made compilations in different parts of India. Our present run of grandmothers know very little of them. The professional story tellers who were very dearly sought after by the old and the young, not to speak of the children, have almost completely disappeared from India. The film industry and the film songs pose a definite threat to folklore.

The Sterling Publishers are to be congratulated for launching the project of publishing a compilation of 20 volumes consisting of the folk tales of different regions. The work has been entrusted to specially selected writers who have an intimate knowledge of their region. The regional complex of the stories has been sought to be preserved as far as possible. The stories have an elemental involvement about them and they are such as are expected to appeal to the child and its parents. We expect the reader of the folk tales of the particular region to feel after reading the stories, that he has enjoyed a whiff of the air of that area. We want him to have an idea of how Kashmiri folks retire in wintry night with the *Kangri* under the folds of their clothes to enjoy a gossip and how they enjoy their highly spiced meaty food. We want him to appreciate the splash of the colours of the sari and the flowers that are a must in Tamil Nadu. We want him to know the stories that are behind some of the famous temples in the South such as the Kanjeevaram temple. We want him to know the story regarding the construction of the famous Konarak temple. We want him to enjoy the stories of the heroes of Gujarat, Punjab and Rajasthan in their particular roles. We want the reader to have an idea of the peace and quiet of a hut in the lap of the Kumaon hills. We want the reader to enjoy some of the folk tales of Bengal and Bihar that have found wings in other parts of India and to appreciate the village life with its *Alpana* and *Bratas*. At the same time we want the reader to appreciate the customs and manners of the Santhals, Garos, and the other tribes inhabiting Nefas and Assam.

The Publishers want to have a miniature India in these volumes of folk tales of the different regions of India. It is an ambitious project. The authors have to be thanked for their interest in the work. I am sure they have enjoyed the assignment. It is hoped the books will be found useful and interesting to the public. I have no hesitation in saying that the stories of the different areas do make out a miniature India. It is hoped the reader will enjoy the stories and will come to know a little of the region and its people.

*P.C. Roy Chaudhury*

## PREFACE

Folk Tales are popular and numerous in Orissa. But few, till now, have been written in English. I have attempted to present only some of the popular folk tales of Orissa.

Many of the folk tales which have come down to us in this generation, have an ancient origin. These tales have no authors as authorship is now understood. They were not written out as books and were transmitted orally. This was a popular and effective vehicle for their dissemination at a time when illiteracy was widely prevalent. Often, these stories were narrated by pilgrims to one another in their long journeys. Sometimes, they were narrated in the temple courtyards, where the village folk gathered in large numbers on festive occasions. But perhaps, the most common vehicles of transmission were the grandmothers. Their intense faith in the reality of the stories contributed largely to their existence even to this day. The grandchildren, with gaping mouths, listened in wonder and the stories never faded from their memories.

As might be expected, the tales went through different variations and adopted different local colours as they passed from person to person and from generation to generation. It is not surprising to note that more or less similar stories are prevalent even in distant states of India, owing mostly to the fact that pilgrims from different parts of this large country often congregated at the famous all-India pilgrimage centres, especially at Puri.

Orissa's civilization and culture go back to very ancient times. Owing to a series of factors, this ancient land remained in comparative poverty and its ancient glory was little known to modern civilization. The rivers with their periodical floods and the frequent droughts have put the country to various hardships. Superstition was a factor in the life of the people. Men feared the unknown and attributed many things to the supernatural. Misfortunes and sorrows were attributed to the wrath of the gods. The folk tales

of Orissa project the hardships, fears, struggles, superstition and poverty of the people.

The Oriyas were great builders of temples and the land is full of beautiful temples. This fact, too, has influenced some of the stories.

The folk tales of Orissa are distinctive in character inasmuch as many of the stories depict Orissa's ancient trade with far off lands like Java, Sumatra, Bali etc. Therefore, merchants, boats and maritime trade occur in quite a number of the stories.

Here it would be only fair to mention that Orissa's gratitude is due to the labours, in recent times, of Sri Gopal Chandra Praharaj, Dr. Kunja Behari Das, Sri Sridhara Das and others, who have collected and compiled some of the folk tales. Perhaps, a good many of these stories would have disappeared, but for the labours of these pioneers.

SHANTI MOHANTY

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# 1

## WHY DHARMAPADA SACRIFICED HIS LIFE

ORISSA is the land of many splendid and gracious temples. The finest of the temples is that of Konarka. This temple was built by Narasimha Deva, a great king who ruled in Utkal<sup>1</sup> hundreds of years ago. It took twelve hundred artisans twelve long years to build this temple. The King had chosen the best artisans of the land for this work. He had ordered that none of the builders could visit his home until the temple was completed.

The chief architect of the temple was Bisu Maharana. When Bisu left home to work on the temple, his wife was expecting a child. Some months later a son was born to him, but the father was not allowed to leave his work and go home to see his newly-born son.

Twelve years rolled by, yet Bisu could not see his son. In the meantime, the lovely baby grew up into a handsome boy. His mother adored him and bestowed great care on his upbringing. She named him "Dharmapada" and sometimes, lovingly called him "Dharma". She took care to see that her son learned the craft of his forefathers. She taught him the art of temple-building. Even as a child Dharmapada showed keen interest in this art. He spent hours building toy temples and forts in stone or wood. Those who saw his handiwork, wondered at his skill. They said that Dharma would one day become a great architect.

When he was five years old, he was sent to the village school. The boy had a keen intellect and

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1. Another name for Orissa,

quickly learnt his lessons. His teachers liked him, his friends loved him, but there were some boys who were jealous of him.

One day, in the school, as the boys were writing, Dharma's chalk slipped from his fingers and rolled away from him. He asked one of his class-mates to pick it up for him. The boy not only refused to pick it up but also insulted Dharma. "Who are you to order me? Whose son do you think you are?" he asked rudely. A few other boys joined together and said, "Yes, yes. Tell us your father's name. Have you ever seen him?" Dharma was confused. He did not know what to say. The boys teased him, "Oh, no, you have no father," and they laughed at him. Poor Dharmapada felt insulted and returned home sad.

His mother was worried to find the son in a sorrowful mood. "Why are you so sad, my child?" she asked. "Ever since your father left home to build the temple at Chandrabhaga<sup>1</sup> you have been the only joy in my life. Tell me truly, what grieves you?"

"Mother, I have never seen my father. Why does he not come home? Today my class-mates insulted me by saying I have no father," replied Dharmapada in anguish.

"What! You have no father! Who dare say so? Believe me, your father is the chief architect of the finest temple that is being built. I have told you this before. You belong to a noted family of builders. They have built many temples and fortresses in this land of Utkal. Anyone should be proud of such ancestry," said his mother.

1. The ancient name of the place Konarka. In olden times it was a famous place of pilgrimage.

"Oh mother, I know the boys at school are jealous of me. Now I understand. But please tell me more about my father and my forefathers."

"Listen, my child, your forefathers helped in the building of the great temple of Jagannath at 'Srikhetra'<sup>1</sup>. When the temple was completed, they were rewarded by King Indradyumna. Years later, when Emperor Kharavela had the beautiful caves at Khandagiri carved out of rocks, it was your forefathers who did the work. Again, King Lalatendu Deva engaged your ancestors to build the great temple of Shiva at 'Ekamrakanana'<sup>2</sup>. Years later your grandfather went to repair the 'Barabati'<sup>3</sup> fortress at 'Katak'. He died there before the work was completed and he never returned home. You belong to the family of such famous builders, who have left their mark on all the beautiful temples and forts of Utkal."

"Oh mother, I wish to prove worthy of my ancestors," said Dharma, glowing with pride. "Now, tell me about my father and the work he is doing."

"Your father has been engaged by our great King Narasimha Deva. He is the chief among the artisans. The King has ordered that none of the builders should leave the temple area and visit their homes until the temple is built. Your father, therefore, has not been able to see you. He is building a great temple dedicated to the Sun god at Chandrabhaga on the seacoast. Chandrabhaga is a holy place to which many go on pilgrimage. They say that the temple is nearing completion and I hope your father will soon return home."

1. Another name for Puri, the holy city of Jagannath.

2. Ancient name for Bhubaneswar, the present capital of Orissa.

3. An old fort at Cuttack now, in ruins,

Dharma became impatient. "Mother," he said, "I want to go to Chandrabhaga to see my father and the temple he is building. It will also be a pilgrimage for me to the holy place. I shall not stay there long. I shall bring news of father to you. Mother, won't you let me go?"

She, at first, would not consent to this. But when she found that he had set his heart on going, she could not refuse him. Before Dharma set out on his journey, his mother blessed him and said, "May the gods protect you from all danger and enable you to meet your father." She added, "Take these berries from our garden. Your father likes them. This will also be a token by which your father will know you. These berries are grown only in our garden."

With his mother's blessings, Dharma set out on the journey towards Chandrabhaga. Though he was young and the way was unknown to him, he travelled on bravely. As he neared the seacoast, his heart thrilled with joy at the sight of the sand-dunes and the tall casurina trees. When the wind blew, the leaves seemed to whisper to him words of welcome. He heard the roar of the breakers as they washed the sandy shore. The fishermen were busy unloading the day's catch. The sea-gulls hovered over the boats and the air was filled with the shrill cries of the birds and shouts of the fishermen. As he walked further, he got a glimpse of the magnificent temple from a distance. The blue sea with its mighty waves and the beautiful temple by its side filled him with wonder.

When he came nearer, he found the place bustling with activity. Workmen with tools in their hands were chiselling huge stones, carving out figures on them, others were lifting stones and fixing them;

all were busy with their work. Dharmapada did not know anyone there. He was at a loss how to find his father in that crowd. He went about asking for Bisu Maharana. It did not, however, take him long to find his father. He made himself known to his father, gave him the berries and gave him news of home.

Bisu was delighted to meet his son, whom he had longed to see in those many years. He took Dharma by his hand and showed him around the temple, describing to him the many details of the work. Dharma saw the magnificent temple built in the shape of a chariot. The mighty wheels of the chariot were artistically carved with designs. The stone horses drawing the chariot looked so real. Every stone was adorned with beautiful carvings. The sculptured figures of men and women, of elephants and horses, of musicians and dancing girls, looked so life-like to Dharmapada that he gaped at them with wonder.

His father explained to him, "This temple has been built to the Sun god. The King wants to make it a wonder of the world, so that many would come from far and near to offer worship to the Sun god and admire its beauty." Bisu continued, "The building work has already taken twelve years and the temple is not yet complete. The King is anxious to have it finished soon. His dream has come true except for the crown stone which remains to be fixed on the temple. We have been working hard to fix it, but all our efforts have failed. Every time it is placed on the top, it has fallen down. There must be some mistake somewhere. Yesterday, the King in his impatience and anger commanded that the temple should be completed within three days, or else, all the artisans would be put to death. Today after sunset, the artisans are meeting together to discuss what should be done. I don't see much hope and the time is very short. We are at our wit's end."

Dharmapada felt sad to see his father and his kinsmen in distress. He begged his father for permission to be present at the meeting.

In the meeting various opinions were put forth. They were discussed, but none seemed workable. At last, Dharmapada stood up and with folded hands addressed the gathering. "Sirs, I have something to say if you will deign to hear me. I think I can be of service. Please do not spurn at my age. I hope to set aright the crown stone on the temple top. I only beg you to give me a chance."

They were all amazed to hear the lad speak thus. Some said, "What! Where we with all our skill and experience have failed, how can a mere lad succeed? He is boasting."

Some others said, "Let us not stand on our pride, but give the boy a chance. As it is, we have failed. We have nothing to lose by giving him a chance."

To this some others replied, "Why? We have everything to lose. When it is known that twelve hundred artisans failed to fix the crown stone, and a lad from nowhere came along and did the job, what will people say of us? Where will our dignity be? When this reaches the King's ears, do you think he will spare our lives?"

At last an old artisan said, "In either case, we stand in danger of our lives. Even if a boy from among us succeeds, our caste will still be held in esteem. But, if the temple remains incomplete, remember, this race of builders will for ever remain in disgrace. Let us put aside our pride and leave the work in his hands." The old artisan's words appealed to all and they decided to let Dharmapada try.

Early the next day, Dharma went round the temple looking closely into the details of its structure. He spent hours studying the different parts of the temple. After a while, he climbed up to the temple top and worked on the capital far into the night. The twelve hundred artisans had no sleep that night. They were anxiously waiting for the result. At the first peep of day, to the amazement of all, the crown top became visible from its height. Dharmapada came down with his face beaming with joy. His father ran towards him and embraced him. The artisans soon surrounded him and showered blessings on him. Although they were happy to see the temple completed, their joy was not unmixed with sorrow. Sensing this, Dharmapada enquired why they still looked sad.

"May you live long, and may your deed be ever remembered. But your achievement will not remain a secret. The King will surely hear of it. You will be rewarded, but our fate is sealed," they replied.



Dharmapada was sad to hear this. "What does it profit me", he said, "when I am rewarded and my kinsmen suffer death? This wonderful temple is your creation. I only fixed the top stone at the very end. I am not worthy of any reward." So saying Dharmapada left their presence.

He thought, "Of what use is my life when my kinsmen suffer on my account? So let a single life be sacrificed for the good of many." Before the first rays of the sun fell on the temple capital, Dharmapada climbed up to the temple top and from there jumped to his death.

Dharmapada is no more. The famous temple is still there, in ruins. The children of Orissa love to hear his story and cherish his memory. Dharmapada has become immortal by sacrificing his life.



## 2

## THE KING WHO WAS CALLED A SWEEPER

**O**N the coast of Orissa where the waters of the Bay of Bengal wash its shores, there stands a great temple, which is known as the Temple of Jagannath. Pilgrims from far and near come to worship at this temple at Puri. But during the *Ratha Jatra* festival, thousands of pilgrims crowd into the city to see the *Jatra*. This festival is held every year in the month of *Asadh*. The image of Jagannath and the images of Balabhadra and Subhadra, his brother and sister, are taken out in procession. These huge wooden chariots are built and colourfully decorated for this festival. The *pandas*<sup>1</sup> bring the idols from the temple and put them in the *rathas* or chariots. The pilgrims pull these cars all the way along the wide *Bada Danda*<sup>2</sup>, a couple of miles away to the garden house. There the idols remain for a week, after which they are pulled back in the chariots to the main temple.

Some hundreds of years ago, there ruled in Orissa, a king by name Purushottam Deva. He was a devout king and an ardent devotee of Jagannath. He was also noted for his humility. He considered his kingdom as belonging to Jagannath and himself merely a servant ruling in his stead.

At the *Ratha Jatra* festival, it was the custom for the King to take a broomstick with a golden handle and sweep the floors of the cars of the deities. This was so, because King Purushottam regarded himself to be a *sevaka* or a servant of the gods. Not until he performed this duty that the cars were drawn by the people.

1. Priests.

2. The Grand Road at Puri.

To the south of the land of Utkal, there lay in those days, the kingdom of Kanchi. King Purushottam, in his exploits in the southern regions, had seen Padmavati, the beautiful daughter of the king of Kanchi. He had fallen in love with her and wanted to make her his queen. He sent a proposal to the King of Kanchi for the hand of his daughter. Padmavati's father not only agreed to the proposal but at the invitation of Purushottam, came to Orissa to witness the *Ratha Jatra*.

During the *Jatra*, the two kings sat on the terrace of the royal palace, close to the temple, and watched the ceremonies. The road from the temple to the garden house was thickly crowded with thousands of pilgrims. With the blowing of conch-shells and the shouts of rejoicing by the vast crowd, the three images were brought out from the temple and put on the chariots reserved for each of them. While all this was being done, the two kings were busily engaged in conversation. Purushottam was explaining the ceremonies to the Ruler of Kanchi.

"Tell me, who built this temple and who started the worship of Jagannath here?" the King of Kanchi asked.

"This great temple that we see before us, was built by King Indradyumna," answered Purushottam Deva. He continued, "Indradyumna completed the building of the temple; but there was no god to be enshrined in it. Then, he saw in a dream, Nilamadhava, the God of the 'Savaras'<sup>1</sup>. King Indradyumna wanted to enshrine the god in the new temple. He sent Bidyapati, his minister, to the Savara village to get the image of Nilamadhava. Bidyapati went and dwelt in the house of Biswabasu, the Savara chief, and married

1. An aboriginal tribe of Orissa.

his daughter, Lalita. The Savaras worshipped Nilamadhava in secret in a shrine hidden deep in the forest. No stranger was allowed there. So, Bidyapati did not know how he could ever reach the shrine of Nilamadhava. He took the help of Lalita, who induced her father to take him to the shrine. But, Bidyapati was first blindfolded and then led to the secret shrine. The minister, however, was equal to the occasion and had secretly carried with him a handful of mustard seeds. These, he dropped little by little as he went along on the way. At the shrine, in great excitement, he saw the image of Nilamadhava in the form of a deep blue stone. Again he was blindfolded and brought back. Bidyapati returned and reported everything to King Indradyumna.

"Patiently, Indradyumna and his minister waited till the season came for the mustard seeds to blossom. Then, Bidyapati took the King with him to the Savara village. The golden flowers clearly pointed the way and with no difficulty they came to the hidden shrine."

The King of Kanchi, who was listening intently, became curious and enquired, "Now, tell me. Is Nilamadhava the same God as Jagannath?"

"Yes," replied Purushottam, "he is the very same God, but now worshipped in a different form. This is how it happened."

He continued, "At the shrine, that night, Nilamadhava once again appeared in a dream before King Indradyumna. He said, 'Oh King! Hear my words and fail not to carry out my will. I am tired of this place. I do not desire to stay here any longer. Their fruit offerings, made day after day, do not satisfy me. I long for sweetmeats and food that is cooked. Again, I do not desire to be worshipped here as Nilamadhava. I should hereafter be known

as Jagannath. You will find a log of wood floating in the sea near Nilachala. My image should be cut out of this log and enshrined in the new temple you have just built.' The King woke up from his dream and strangely enough found that the blue stone had vanished.

"Indradyumna and his minister hastened to fulfil the will of the God. Sure enough they found, as in the dream, the log of wood floating near the coast of Nilachala. The King had the log taken out of water. He searched for a skilled carpenter who could fashion out an image of Jagannath. Many carpenters came but the moment they tried to cut the log, their chisels broke into pieces. At last an old carpenter, named Ananta Maharana, came and assured the King that he would get the image ready in twenty-one days. He made a condition that he should be locked up with the log in a room for twenty-one days. During this period he should not be disturbed and the doors should remain locked. This was done. Daily the curious King and others went near the locked room and heard the sound of wood-work going on inside. But a few days before the allotted time no sound was heard from within. The King grew anxious because he feared that the old carpenter who had no food and water must have died. In great anxiety the King got the doors opened and to his surprise found no carpenter inside. There were only three unfinished images."

"Therefore," Purushottam continued, "the images were enshrined in their unfinished form and are worshipped as such till now. This is how Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra came to be worshipped here in the temple."

King Purushottam had just finished the long narrative when it was time for him to go down and

sweep the floors of the chariots of the deities. As he swept the cars one after the other, people loudly cheered him. But the sight of a king doing the work of a sweeper did not please the Ruler of Kanchi. He was filled with contempt for King Purushottam.

Soon after the *Ratha Jatra*, the King of Kanchi returned to his country. He did not lose any time in sending word to the Ruler of Utkal that he would not give his daughter in marriage to a *chandala*<sup>1</sup>.

Purushottam was enraged. He took it as an insult not only to himself but also to his God Jagannath, and he vowed revenge.

War was declared by Purushottam against Kanchi. In the war Purushottam was defeated. Next year he again declared war against Kanchi and this time he invoked the help of the gods. He marched with his hosts and before he had gone far, a milkmaid by name Manika<sup>2</sup> met him in a village.

"Two of your men on horseback went ahead. One of them rode on a black horse and the other on a white horse. The men were thirsty and bought buttermilk from me. They had no money to pay with and they gave me this ring to be shown to you. They asked me to take money from you," she said.

The moment the King saw the ring, he knew that it belonged to Jagannath. He was now sure that the riders were none other than Jagannath and Balabhadra who had gone ahead to fight for him. He took it as a sure sign of victory. Purushottam boldly marched forward with his army. This time, he defeated the King of Kanchi and brought Padmavati

1. Sweeper.

2. There is, today, a village called Manikapatna, named after the milkmaid, Manika, where this incident took place.

a captive. In his anger, the King refused to marry her but resolved to teach her proud father a lesson.

"Her father had called me a *chandala*. Take her and marry her to a *chandala*. See that she becomes the wife of a low caste sweeper," he angrily ordered his minister.

Though the minister was grieved to hear this, he humbly replied, "The King's order will be carried out."

But the kind minister did not marry Padmaavati to a sweeper. Instead he took her to his own home where he and his wife took care of the princess as their own daughter. They were, of course, careful to keep it a secret from the King.

Months passed by. At the next *Ratha Jatra* festival, the King went up the chariot of Jagannath to sweep its floor as usual. Just then, his minister came up with Padmaavati, and addressing the King said,



"Oh my King, you had asked me to marry princess Padmavati to a *chandala*. Where can I find a more suitable *chandala* than your worthy self to marry her? Sir, here is this beautiful princess. Make her your queen. It has taken me some time to carry out your order. Now I am fulfilling your desire. May the gods bless you and make you both happy."

The King had all along truly loved Padmavati and was rejoiced at the clever plan of his minister. He forgot all his anger against the Ruler of Kanchi and married his daughter with great romp and show.

Even to this day, the descendants of Purushottam and Padmavati continue to perform the duties of a sweeper of the deities at every *Ratha Jatra* festival. The Raja of Puri sweeps the floor of the temple in the presence of thousands of onlookers.



# 3

## SUDARSAN GAINS WISDOM AFTER MANY EXPERIENCES

**S**UDARSAN was a high caste Brahman of Banapur. Whenever there was any religious ceremony in the village Sudarsan was called for. There was hardly a marriage or sacred thread ceremony where he was not seen. He earned his living by acting as a priest in these ceremonies. But the village was small and such ceremonies were few and far between. So Sudarsan was often in want.

One day, he was invited by a rich man from a neighbouring village to act as priest in his daughter's wedding. After the marriage was over, Sudarsan received gifts of money, clothes and large quantity of rice grains and some coconuts. He had never before been paid so well.

Sudarsan joyfully returned home with the treasure. He was fond of good food and he liked *pithas*<sup>1</sup> best of all. He told his wife, "I have been longing to eat *pithas*. Now you have everything here for making them. Please make some, and we will eat to our heart's content."

His wife soon became busy making preparations for the *pithas*. After they were ready, Sudarsan's wife set before him a plateful of rice-cakes. Sudarsan was about to eat, when there came a piteous cry from outside, "Mother," cried a beggar, "I am dying of hunger. Have pity on me and save my life. For the last two days, I have had no food." His cry fell on the ears of Sudarsan just as he was going to have the first bite of the rice-cake. Though very hungry, his

1. Rice-cakes.

heart melted. Too well he knew the pangs of hunger. Straightway, he got up with all the cakes and put them in the beggar's bowl. The beggar was more like a skeleton than a living being and hastily swallowed the delicious food. He wiped his face and blessed the Brahman. "Long have I been wandering from door to door but no one had pity on me. I went to many big houses, yet no one gave me one morsel. But you saved my life. May your riches grow day by day. May want never come to your door." Then he looked around and seeing none, added, "Follow me, sir, I can do somethin' for you."

The beggar led the way and the Brahman followed. They walked on and came to a forest. They kept on walking deep into the thick bushes. The tall trees all around looked like so many ghosts mocking at the Brahman with their empty stomachs. A little while later, he could walk no more and wearily, almost slumped to the ground.

But what was this! The beggar had vanished! It all looked so unreal to Sudarsan. All of a sudden the beggar appeared again before him with a pan in his hand. "Take this pan, sir," he announced, "and ask it whatever food you want and whenever you want it." So saying he disappeared.

It all seemed so strange, so wonderful. Sudarsan then looking at the 'pan' said, "Give me some *pithas*," and lo, the delicacies were right before him. Joyfully, the Brahman ate them and then went back home rejoicing, with the pan in his hand. All the way, he was thinking in his mind how much his dear wife would rejoice at this wonderful gift.

On the way, he felt thirsty and put the treasured pan at the foot of a tall tree. A group of boys were playing nearby and looking at the boys he said, "Keep

an eye on this pan. But boys, I warn you, don't ask it to give you any food." He went ahead a little to a brook to drink water.

But boys are boys. They were most curious at this strange warning. The moment the Brahman was out of sight, looking at the pan, they all, in one voice, asked, "Oh pan, give us sweets". To their great joy there were before them the best sweets they had ever tasted. Quickly, they ate up all the sweets. But how could they leave behind a treasure which would always provide such wonders. They put another pan in its place and carried the magic pan to their home.

After drinking water, Sudarsan came back to the tree and walked home with the pan. On reaching home, he told his wife all about their good fortune. "You will be like a Rani, and I, a Raja, eating sweet-meats and the best cakes all the day long! Do you know this 'pan' will give us whatever we like to eat and in plenty too? Take it and ask it right now what you like to eat." But when they asked the pan for gifts of food, nothing happened. All their dreams had gone. Without any food, they spent a sleepless night.

The next morning, the Brahman went to the forest and to his joy the same beggar appeared before him.

"I know you have lost the pan. Don't be foolish again. I now give you a box and whenever you ask for clothes you will find it stuffed with the richest and the costliest clothes. You may sell these and buy all that you need," said the beggar.

Again the foolish Brahman, who had not yet learnt his lesson, put the box near the tree, where

the same boys were playing. "I am coming in a moment. Keep an eye here," he said, "but do not ask the box to give any clothes."

The boys who now knew more about the Brahman, waited till he was out of sight. Then approaching the box, they said, "Oh box, give us clothes to wear."

Immediately they found the box full of rich and costly clothes. They put on these nice looking, rich clothes and looked like princes. The boys, of course, put another box there and carried this precious treasure home.

The Brahman came back a little while later, and took the box home to his wife. "Here you are," he addressed her, "rich clothes and in plenty, only ask the box and it will give you. We need no longer remain poor. Whenever we need money we can sell the clothes."

His wife anxiously asked the box to give her silk saris. But, of course, the box did nothing.

In disgust, the woman gave a kick to the box and calling her husband a liar, she asked, "Is this the way you should deceive your wife? Yesterday you gave me the sweetmeats and today you are giving me silk saris ! You are a liar ! Mind, if you treat your wife in this way you need not expect her to stay here any longer. I must go back to my parents."

The next day, with a heavy heart, Sudarsan went to the forest. Who would look after him if his wife went away? An empty stomach and a lonely heart! Could he bear all this? With such sad thoughts he came to the jungle and on arrival there, again, he met his benefactor.

"You fool," he scolded, "I gave you food and clothes but you could retain neither. It is hard to

pardon your folly. Yet, one more chance I give you. Take this club and deal with the wicked boys."

Soon, the Brahman went to the spot where he had met the boys before and putting the club down, warned the boys, "Beware, don't ask anything of this club." They inwardly smiled and assured the Brahman that they would have nothing to do with his club.

Many good things had come out of the pan and the box. How could the boys forget such sweets and such clothes! 'Surely something else will come from this club,' they thought.

The moment the Brahman was out of sight, the boys cried, "Oh club, give us something; oh, club, give us something." To their horror the club rose up and fell on each one of them with heavy strokes on their heads. Crying in pain, the boys ran to their village, but the merciless club followed them hitting hard all the time. The screaming boys ran to their parents for help and protection but none could help them. The parents with tears in their eyes, fell at Sudarsan's feet and begged him for help. "Do not let our boys be killed," they cried. "Have mercy on them and save them."

"Not until my pan and box are returned will I help," replied the angry Brahman.

"Take your pan, take your box," they said, producing those quickly. Sudarsan was satisfied and shouted at the club, "Stop." The beating forthwith stopped and the Brahman happily returned home with his magic pan, box and club.

Sudarsan and his wife, ever afterwards, had plenty of rich food and nice clothes. They lived in comfort and they were also safe because they had the magic club with them.



## 4

### WHY A BRITISH CAPTAIN BOWED BEFORE A REBEL CHIEF

OVER two hundred years ago the Marathas were rulers in Orissa. They appointed a local chief as Raja, but themselves lived far out in the west of the country. This Raja collected revenues on behalf of his masters, the Marathas. There were numerous *Paikas*<sup>1</sup> under the Raja who fought the Raja's battles, and in return got gifts of land for which they had to pay no revenue.

But when the Britishers came and conquered Orissa the *Paikas* lost their lands to the British. There was much discontent on this account. Soon this discontent spread like wild fire and the *Paikas* banded together to fight the British.

At that time, there lived in the village of Narangarh, one Dalabehera, whose name is cherished even today by many in Orissa. He was the headman of the village, and had the heart of a prince. People called him the friend of the poor, and no person in need ever returned from him empty-handed. Even men from distant parts adored him and said that he was more like a god than man.

When the *Paikas* revolted, Dalabehera took the lead and fought against the British. In the beginning victory was on the side of the *Paikas*. They captured a number of places from the British, but soon fresh armies were brought against them and the revolt was firmly put down. Brutal punishment of the *Paikas* followed their defeat. Many were caught and hanged and many imprisoned. A number of

1. Soldiers of Orissa in olden times.

*Paikas* fled to the jungle for safety and refuge. Yet the anger of the British captain was not satisfied. He wanted the head of Dalabehera. But Dalabehera was hiding in the jungle and he could not be traced. So a reward of one thousand rupees was offered to anyone who would capture Dalabehera. In spite of keen searches all over, Dalabehera could not be captured. He was living in a thick jungle and depended on wild fruits and roots and water from the forest brooks. His clothes were tattered and with over-growing hair and beard he looked utterly miserable.

One day while roaming, Dalabehera met a man who looked deeply distressed. The man came up to Dalabehera and pitiously asked the way to Naranagarh.

"What makes you go to Naranagarh?" asked Dalabehera in surprise. "Whom do you want there?"

"I am going to Dalabehera of Naranagarh," replied the man.

"I know Dalabehera but tell me why do you want to meet him?" asked Dalabehera.

"Sir, grave misfortune has fallen upon me. My home is in Ganjam. I was coming in a boat with all my merchandise but my boat sank in the *Chilka*<sup>1</sup>. I escaped only with the clothes I am wearing. I have a large family and I have lost everything. There is no one to help me. I have heard the name of Dalabehera. Men say that he is a friend of the helpless. I am sure if I meet him he will not refuse help," said the man.

Dalabehera was struck with the man's story and for a while remained speechless. His noble heart

1. A lake in Orissa.

melted. The picture of the man's helplessness pained him and he made up his mind.

"Come along with me, my friend. I know your Dalabehera very well. He now lives in Khurda and I will take you to him. I also believe that he will help you," said Dalabehera.

But Dalabehera straightway took the man to Khurda to the British Captain who was hunting for his life. Unafraid he stood before the Captain. The Captain however could not imagine that Dalabehera was standing before him.

Curiously he asked, "Who are you and what has brought you here?"

"Sir," boldly asked Dalabehera, "Is it a fact that you have offered a reward of one thousand rupees for Dalabehera's head?"

"Yes, it is true. Do you know the whereabouts of this man?" enquired the Captain.

Dalabehera said, "Please listen, sir, I am Dalabehera, whom your men have not been able to track down. I myself have come to you. Arrest me, sir, and make good your promise. Please pay the reward of one thousand rupees to this most unfortunate man."

Then in moving words he narrated the pitiful story of the man. "He has nothing now with him except the clothes on his body. I cannot bear the thought of such great misery and therefore have come to you. Take me prisoner and pay this man the promised reward."

In silent astonishment, the British Captain listened to the story of the man's great misfortune and Dalabehera's still greater sacrifice.

Uplifted in spirit the British Captain confessed, "Dalabehera, I have long been utterly mistaken. I never knew you were so great in spirit! How could I be revengeful before such greatness? Take one thousand rupees for your friend and also your freedom with it."

The miserable man who was a witness to this amazing story fell at the feet of Dalabehera saying, "Sir, I had thought that you were only a rich man who helped the poor like many other rich men but now I see that you are more like a god than man."



## 5

## A RANI'S REVENGE

IN olden times, there were a number of independent states in Orissa. Banki and Khurda were two such States which had a common boundary. There were frequent border disputes between the two states. Sometimes, these disputes even led to war.

Dhanurjaya, the Raja of Banki, was a renowned warrior who had fought many hard battles. He was a skilful archer and swordsman. His Rani, Shuka Dei, was no less a warrior than her husband. Her skill in horse-riding was well known everywhere.

Banki was a smaller State than Khurda. Her resources in men and materials were poor. But Dhanurjaya's courage was such that he would yield to none and much less to the Raja of Khurda. Once the Raja of Khurda forcibly occupied some villages on the border. Bravely, Dhanurjaya marched forward with his army to fight the invader. That day a severe battle was fought and many were killed. In the end, the small army of Banki could not resist the pressure of a heavy attack. Dhanurjaya fought bravely, but fell into the hands of the enemy and was killed. When they found their ruler slain, the soldiers of Banki gave up the battle as lost and fled from the battle-field.

Soon report of the death of her husband reached Rani Shuka Dei. Her grief knew no bounds, yet her eyes held no tears but flashed fire. Her counsellors came up to her and declared in one voice, "Our Raja is dead. Now there is no hope for us. Let us surrender to the enemy."

"Are we *Kshatriyas*<sup>1</sup> or cowards?" she cried out in anger.

"No, Madam," replied her minister, "we are not cowards. But our State is small and our army smaller. We can never expect to win against Khurda. Our Raja is no more and you, O Rani, are only a woman and Prince Dayanidhi is merely a lad. It is wise to give up now a bit of our territory rather than lose the entire State. This may satisfy the Raja of Khurda."

"What? Yield to the enemy! True, I am a woman but do not forget that I am a *Kshatriya* and *Kshatriya* blood runs in my veins," cried the Rani in anger.

Turning to her *Senapati*<sup>2</sup> she continued, "I will fight and fight, and if need be, die fighting like a *Kshatriya*, but never will I yield even a small strip of land to the enemy."

Feelingly she asked, "Did you not all run away from the battle-field? Tell me, did my husband run away? Bravely, he fought and died in the battle-field. If you are afraid, you may go and hide yourself in your homes. I am going to the battle-field to fight again. If none of you comes with me, let it be known that I, a woman, will alone march forward and fight against Khurda."

Then she added, "Only such as are not afraid of death, need come with me. Make known this, my decision, to my people."

These brave words of a woman put courage in their hearts and they declared, "If you are going to

1. Warrior class.

2. General.

the battle-field, can we stay behind? We can't let you go alone." They added, "We have asked the Raja of Badamba for help, and maybe, help from that quarter is coming."

The Rani's undaunted courage touched everybody, and soon a great army, with the Rani at the head, marched forward against Khurda.

In the meanwhile, the Raja of Khurda was celebrating his victory. When the news of this fresh attack reached his ears he could not believe it.

"Impossible," he said, "The Rani of Banki to attack us? Dare she, a widow, take up such a foolish venture, and that too so soon after the death of her husband? Impossible!" However, he instructed his *Senapati* to make preparations for war.

Great was the surprise of the Raja to see Shuka Dei leading an army against him. Soon a fierce battle raged near the boundary. The Rani's unusual courage gave spirit to her soldiers and they fought bravely. Many deeds of courage were seen on the battle-field and in the end the *Senapati* of Khurda was caught and killed by the Banki army. Thereafter, panic prevailed in the Khurda camp and soon the Raja of Khurda was captured by the Rani's soldiers.

Bound with chains and guarded by the soldiers of Banki, the Raja was brought before Rani Shuka Dei. He was greatly ashamed when he was brought as a prisoner before a woman, and that too a woman whose husband he had so lately killed.

Was not death in the battle-field thousand times better than this disgrace? Surely, revenge is in the Rani's heart and she will not spare my life,' thought the Raja.

The Rani looked at her soldiers and ordered, "Take off the chains and set free the Raja." Then looking at the Raja, she gently said, "You may now return to your own State. No one here will do you any harm."

The Raja was astonished at this most unexpected turn of events. 'What!' he thought, 'She, whom I had taken to be my enemy seeking revenge, now orders my freedom!' With his head bowed he humbly said, "I never imagined that you could show me such mercy."

The Rani rejoined, "Sir, you are my prisoner and if I like I can have your head cut off. But what good would such an act produce? I am a widow. I have a woman's heart. My husband is dead and day and night I am mourning. My grief is too heavy to bear. How could I inflict such a sorrow and such suffering on another woman? No, no, I cannot do this to the Rani of Khurda! I fought with you only to bring back the lost prestige of Banki and not for revenge."

Deeply moved the Raja stood stunned. After a while, he humbly said, "Madam, you got victory over me in the battle-field today, and now you have won a second victory over me by showing such magnanimity. What could my grateful heart say or give to you? I remain for ever indebted to you and as a token of my gratitude, I surrender to you the entire Kusapala *pargana*<sup>1</sup> of Khurda. I vow, that never more shall the sword of Khurda be raised against Banki."

Later, a pillar was raised at Kusapala, to mark the heroism and magnanimity of Rani Shuka Dei. The pillar still exists.

1. A group of villages.



## 6

## THE COWHERD AND THE WITCH

IN a certain village there lived a cowherd. He took out the cows of the villagers for grazing. They paid him money for looking after their cattle. On festival days, however, they also gave the boy sweets prepared at their homes.

It was the day of *Bakula Amavasya*<sup>1</sup>, a day of festival and rejoicing for the village folk. At every home they had prepared *pithas*<sup>2</sup> and other kinds of sweets. In the morning the boy went round the village collecting the cows. As it was a festival day, he got rice-cakes from every home. That day he had plenty to eat. He gave some to his mother and took some with him to eat during the day.

About noon when the cattle were resting, the boy sat down under a banyan tree and ate a few rice-cakes. But how much could he eat? He had already eaten too much but there was still one left over. A funny idea came to his mind. A little away from the banyan tree, he dug the earth and planted the rice-cake as he would plant a seed. Jokingly, he said to the rice-cake, "If you do not sprout by tomorrow morning, I shall strike you with my axe."

Next day he went to the same field with the cows. He had forgotten about the rice-cake. As he sat watching his cattle graze, suddenly he remembered the rice-cake he had planted. He went to the spot to look. To his surprise, the cake had sprouted!

1. A new moon day—a festival day in Orissa, on which mango blossoms are put in different kinds of sweets and offered to the gods invoking their blessings for a good crop of mangoes. After they are offered to the gods, they are usually distributed to the children.

2. Cakes made of rice.

There was a green sprout sticking through the earth. The boy was greatly amused. He said to the sprout, "By tomorrow if I do not find leaves on you, I shall cut you down with my axe."

On the following day, he went straight to the place where he had planted the rice-cake. He was delighted to find the plant covered with leaves. He said, "Now, if there are no rice-cakes on your branches tomorrow, I shall cut you down with my axe."

He went early the next morning to see if his words had really come true. Yes, the tree had borne fruit. The branches were heavy with white rice-cakes. The boy shouted for joy as he climbed the tree. He had his fill of rice-cakes freshly plucked from the tree. He even took some home to his mother.

Now, this he did every day and the tree continued to give him rice-cakes.



One day, the boy was up on the tree singing merrily and eating rice-cakes. A witch saw him. She approached him in the form of an old grey-haired woman and said, "Hello son, how can you eat all the rice-cakes by yourself? Won't you give some to this old woman?"

"Why, the branches are heavy with cakes? You can help yourself."

"Can't you see, son, I am old and weak? My eyes have gone dim. Please pluck some for me."

The boy jumped on the branches and some cakes fell on the ground. "Now pick for yourself as much as you wish."

"Oh, no, no, I won't take these. They are fallen on the ground. They have become dirty. Unless you give with your own hand, I will not have any. Of course, if you don't wish to give any, I will go away. I've had no food since yesterday."

So saying she turned her back and started to go. The boy called her back. From the branches he stooped a little to hand her a couple of cakes. All of a sudden, the witch pulled him down and the boy fell on the ground. Quickly she caught hold of him and put him in her bag. She tied the bag and placing it in her basket, carried him away.

It was a hot sunny day. The basket was heavy and she was tired. She felt thirsty and stopped on the way to drink water. Some men were ploughing in a paddy field nearby. The old witch put down her load on the wayside. "Please keep an eye on this till I return from the brook," she requested the men.

When she was gone, the boy called out gently, "Have mercy on me and save me." The ploughmen

were surprised to hear a human voice coming out of the basket. They untied the bag and set the boy free. Quickly, the lad told them how he was being taken away by the wicked witch. "Now, hurry. Before the witch comes back, run and hide behind the bushes," advised the men. Then they placed some stones in the bag, tied it again and placed it in the basket. When the witch returned, the men were ploughing the field as if nothing had happened.

Without suspecting anything, the witch placed the basket on her head and carried it home. When she reached home her daughter came out to meet her. "Here, take this. There is meat in this basket. Prepare a good meat curry today. Have the food ready when I return from a bath in the river," she said.

When the girl opened the bag, she found only stones. "Do you want me to make curry out of these?" she asked, pointing at the stones, when her mother returned from her bath. The witch came over and looked in. "What! The rascal slipped out of the bag! He cheated me! I'll see that he doesn't escape next time," swore the witch.

After some days, the old witch again went to the rice-cake tree, this time in the form of a beggar woman. She found the boy up on the tree. "What lovely cakes! Won't you give me some? I am so hungry," she begged.

"So you have come again! Do you think I have forgotten you?" the boy asked. "It was my good luck that saved me from your hands. No, you can't deceive me this time."

The witch pretended to be surprised. "I don't know what you are talking about. I never came here

before. You are surely mistaking me for someone else!"

The boy looked at her carefully. He thought, 'Probably, I am mistaken. Perhaps, this is another woman. But let me be careful still.' He held the branch tightly with one hand, and with the other offered some cakes to the woman. "Take these and don't bother me any more," he said.

The witch caught hold his hand quickly and pulled him down. She pulled so hard that the branch broke and the boy fell to the ground. At once the woman tied him securely and carried him away in her basket.

This time the witch was careful not to stop on the way but went straight to her home. She said to her daughter, "Keep everything ready for the cooking while I go to collect some firewood."

When the witch left, the girl untied the bag. Out came a handsome lad. He had thick black hair on his head. Now the witch's daughter was almost bald. Being a girl, she naturally coveted such lovely hair. So she asked the boy, "What do you do to get such nice hair?" At once the boy thought of a plan. "But that's a secret. Why should I tell you when you are going to kill me?" bargained the boy. The girl thought for a moment. Her desire to have long black hair was so great that she promised to set him free if he gave out the secret. The boy said gravely, "Goat's milk helps the hair to grow. Every night, before I go to bed my mother rubs this milk on my head. If you do the same, you will soon find lovely black hair on your head." When the girl learned the secret, in gratitude, she set him free,

She cooked up a story to tell her mother when she returned with the firewood. She said, "O Mother! The boy has run away. I had shut him in the room. I was grinding the spices for the curry, and when I came back he was not there. Look, he has broken the window and has jumped through that." The witch flew into a rage. She gave her daughter a severe beating for her carelessness.

The old witch did not give up. She was now more determined than ever to capture the boy. The boy also knew that the witch would come again. But this time he was well prepared. He had a crow-bar well sharpened and kept ready and hidden on the rice-cake tree.

Sure enough, the witch came again. She stood under the cake tree and begged for some rice-cakes. 'I know you too well by now, old witch,' thought the cowherd. But he said aloud, "Open your mouth, I'll drop some cakes from here." Not knowing what was coming, the witch opened her mouth wide. In the flash of a moment, the cowherd with all his strength thrust the crow-bar into her mouth and killed her. Thus he freed himself from the hands of the witch.



**I**N ancient times, there were a number of ports on the eastern coast of Orissa. Large rivers like the Mahanadi, the Subarnarekha, the Brahmini and the Baitarani were studded with ports. In those days, there lived a class of merchants who were called 'Sadhavas'. They owned large ships which sailed from these ports to distant islands like Ceylon, Java, Sumatra and Bali.

Tanaybanta was one such Sadhava, who had seven ships sailing to and fro on the high seas. He had a large family. His seven sons lived happily with their wives. His only daughter, Tapoyee, was a lovely little girl. She was so gentle and good that all loved her.

Tapoyee had many friends. Her days passed joyfully playing with them. They played many games together. Sometimes, they played the game of Cowrie<sup>1</sup>, at other times they went to the garden to swing. But the game Tapoyee loved best was digging in the sand by the riverside, making sand-houses and playing with sand. Tapoyee had a set of toy pots and pans with which she played the game of imaginary cooking. She would take a handful of sand, pebbles and a little water in the pots and imagine that she was cooking rice and curry. Sometimes her playmates would join her. Then they would serve these on banana leaves spread on the ground and sit down to enjoy an imaginary feast.

One day, while she was busy playing alone, an old woman approached her. She stood by her

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1. Small sea-shells used in a game of dice,

side and watched her for a while. Then she laughed at Tapoyee and said, "Well, well, you are a stupid girl, indeed! It's a shame for a rich man's daughter to play with earthen pots. Why? Can't your father afford to give you golden pots and pans? He is so rich that he can make for you even a golden moon!"

After the wicked woman left, Tapoyee pondered over her words. Her innocent mind was now upset. She became morose. She could not play any longer. She broke all her earthen pots and returned home sadly.

At home, she refused food and would not talk to anyone. Her parents, brothers and their wives were much distressed. They tried in vain to find out from her the cause of her sorrow. At last Nilendi, her youngest brother's wife, went up to her and said, "Tapoyee dear, won't you listen to me? I'll do anything for you, give anything you ask. Only tell me what is the matter with you. Why are you so sad?" Now, Tapoyee loved Nilendi more than any of her sisters-in-law. With tears in her eyes, Tapoyee said, "Father is so rich, yet he has never given me costly toys to play with! I play with only pots and pans made of clay. Others mock at me. Why should I not be sad?" Then she remembered the old woman's words, and added, "I want a golden moon to play with!"

Nilendi consoled her and said, "Is this all you want? Now get up and be a good girl. Come and eat. Your father will surely give you a moon made of gold."

Though it cost him a lot of money, Tanaybanta loved his daughter so much that he had a golden moon made for her. But, alas, Tapoyee's request was ill-fated. When the golden moon was half

done, her father died. When the moon was completed, she lost her mother. Tapoyee had her wish, but she could not enjoy playing with the golden moon. She then realized that her request was not proper. She should not have listened to the words of the wicked woman.

The funeral ceremonies of the parents were duly performed. After the mourning period was over, Tanaybanta's sons took up the business of their father. The ships had been lying idle for some months. The brothers decided that they should go out on a long voyage to distant islands with their merchandise. With the advice of the Brahmans, an auspicious day for the voyage was fixed. The ships were fitted out and loaded with cargo.

The merchants' wives all wanted one thing or the other to be brought for them from the far off lands. One asked for a pearl necklace to be brought from Lanka<sup>1</sup>. Another wanted a pair of ear tops, with eight different gems on them, from Sumatra. Yet another requested for a silk sari from Bali. In this way all the seven wives made their requests. When it came to the turn of Tapoyee, she would not ask for anything. "I do not want anything. All that I want is that my brothers should return home safely," she said. But when they insisted that she should name something to be brought for her, she replied, "You can bring anything that you like."

On the day fixed for the voyage, before leaving home, the Sadhavas called their wives together and told them, "Take good care of our sister. She has lost her parents and is sad. Attend to all her needs carefully. Keep her happy and see that no harm befalls her." As was the custom, the merchants and

1. Ceylon.

all the womenfolk of the house went down to the riverside where the boats were moored, to perform *puja*<sup>1</sup> in the ships to Goddess Mangala, the protecting deity of the Sadhavas. Rice grains, *dub*<sup>2</sup> grass, berry leaves, flowers and lamps were arranged on silver plates. The lamps were lit, and oblations were offered to the Goddess. The womenfolk sang songs in praise of Mother Mangala and prayed for the safety of the merchants. They applied sandalwood paste on the foreheads of their husbands and bade them farewell.

There in the ships they parted with many words of tenderness. It was not customary to weep on such an auspicious occasion. Yet, Tapoyee and her sisters-in-law could not help shedding tears as they came out of the boats. They stood on the bank of the river and blew conch-shells until the ships were out of sight.



1. Worship.

2. A kind of grass.

For a time all went well. Her sisters-in-law took great care of Tapoyee bestowing all their love and attention upon her. In this way many days passed. But Tapoyee's happiness was shortlived.

One day a beggar woman called at their house and asked for some rice to eat. She was there begging for a long time, but none paid attention to her. At last, the eldest brother's wife came out. The woman said, "I have been begging for a little rice so long, but no one cared to listen to me!" She replied, "Why? We are all busy. There is such a lot of work to attend to in this house. Besides, my husband's sister needs so much looking after that there is little time for anything else. We have to do every thing to keep her happy."

This was the same old woman who had earlier talked to Tapoyee and had brought sorrow to the family. Now, she said mischievously, "Who is this fortunate girl to have seven sisters-in-law dancing attendance on her? Why should you do all that for her? After all, do you think she will speak a good word for you to her brothers when they return home? I tell you, she will, on the other hand, speak ill of you. The ungrateful girl will tell stories against you to her brothers. Take my word, your husbands will more readily believe her than believe you. Let me tell you how you can get rid of her. Now is the time to do something. Send her daily to the jungle with the goats. I am sure, there she will be eaten up by a wolf or be bitten by a snake. You can then tell her brothers that she died of pox."

Her words pleased the eldest sister-in-law. Gradually, she was able to poison the minds of the others against Tapoyee. Soon the poor girl was given all kinds of domestic chores. Nilendi, however, did not like this, but she was powerless. Tapoyee

was given coarse clothes to wear and was treated like a servant in her own home. She swept the floor, washed clothes, pounded rice and did all the hard manual work. For all she did, she did not have a kind word from her sisters-in-law. However well she worked she was found fault with and was often scolded. In her misery, she cried many a time. She longed for the old days and prayed for her brother's quick return. But the worst was yet to come.

One morning, Tapoyee's eldest brother's wife called her and said, "You are a lazy girl. You are idling yourself at home. Hereafter, you should take out the goats daily to the jungle for grazing. Be careful! See that the goats are not lost. If I find any goat missing, I'll punish you severely." Then she threw a basket at her saying, "Take this, here is some food for you for the mid-day meal."

With tears rolling down her cheeks, Tapoyee went out driving the goats. She had never before known the heat of the sun. She found it unbearable. Her tender feet bled as she walked bare-footed in the jungle. At noon she opened the basket. When she saw what was inside, she cried bitterly. The basket was full of ashes and dirt with a handful of parched rice thrown on top. She was very hungry. Tapoyee, who at one time did not know what hunger was and always ate the best food, now had to satisfy her hunger with the little parched rice in the basket. In her distress, she wept. But who would save her? Her parents were dead, her brothers were far away.

The next day the same thing was repeated. The second sister-in-law gave her very little food for the mid-day. In this way six days passed until there came the seventh day, when it was Nilendi's turn to give her food. Secretly, Nilendi packed a good meal

of fine rice and tasty curries for Tapoyee. That day Tapoyee had a good meal.

In this way dragged on days and months. One day, as Tapoyee was herding the goats back home, she found one of the best goats missing. It was getting dark. The sky was overcast with clouds. Already it had started to rain. Tapoyee called out for the goat and searched high and low, but nowhere was the goat to be seen. She returned home with a heavy heart. She feared that she would be badly punished.

As soon as the eldest sister-in-law learnt of the missing goat, she brought out a stick to beat Tapoyee. The poor girl ran away into the jungle to save herself. In the dark and alone in the forest, she was seized with fear. Her grief knew no bounds. In her desperation she cried aloud, "Oh! Mother Mangala! Have mercy on me. Bring back my brothers and put an end to my suffering."

Little did she know that at that time the ship had arrived at the riverside and her brothers had returned. Her sorrowful wailing filled the forest air. Her brothers were astonished to hear someone weeping in the jungle nearby. Some of them left the ships and went to offer help. They saw a girl sitting under a tree and weeping, the picture of sorrow, "Who are you? Why are you crying here at such an hour?" asked the Sadhavas.

"I have none in this world to care for me. My parents are dead. My brothers are far away and their wives treat me cruelly," she replied sobbing.

Then the brothers knew who she was. "Why, you are Tapoyee! Our beloved sister!" they exclaimed.

She lifted up her tearful face and said, "Ah, my brothers! Yes, I am Tapoyee, your unfortunate sister." Then she told them all that had happened in their absence.

They took her to the ship. There they all heard how cruelly their wives had treated Tapoyee while they were away. Tapoyee was happy beyond measure. Her days of misery seemed to end.

Early in the morning, they sent a servant to their wives with a message. They said, "Go home and tell the ladies that we have arrived safely. Ask them to come here with Tapoyee to perform *puja* in the ships and welcome us back home, as is our custom."

As soon as they heard the news, the merchants' wives became busy arranging the offerings on silver plates. With these they hurried to the riverside to welcome their husbands. As for Tapoyee, they were sure that she was killed by some wild animal in the forest and to deceive their husbands, they had cooked up a story about Tapoyee's death through illness.

But when they reached the ship, to their dismay, they found Tapoyee on the deck of the ship, decked beautifully in nice clothes and jewellery. The Sadhavas were angry with their wives and punished them for ill-treating Tapoyee, but Nilendi, who had shown kindness to the girl, was rewarded by them.

This story relates to hundreds of years ago. It is remembered and recited by girls in Orissa during the festival of *Tapoyee Ossa*. This festival is observed in worship of Goddess Mangala, on every Sunday during the month of *Bhadra*. On each of these Sundays, the girls in Orissa undertake a fast, perform *puja* and pray to Goddess Mangala to grant them their wishes as she had once granted Tapoyee's wish.



**THE CONCH-SHELL**

**I**N a certain village, on the coast of Orissa, there once dwelt a simpleton. His name was Madhua. He was so stupid that he was not able to do even a simple job. Luckily for him he had a good wife. She did odd jobs here and there and supported him.

Once she fell seriously ill. Madhua then realized that it was his duty to look after her and nurse her back to health. He needed money to buy food and medicines. So he went out in search of a job. But who would employ him? Everyone knew that he was good-for-nothing. He tried hard but did not get a job. Poor Madhua was so dejected that he did not wish to return home and see his sick wife dying before his very eyes. He did not wish to live any longer. He went to drown himself in the sea. Sitting on the seashore, he cried bitterly, "Oh god, how can I live? What good is life without brain, without money? Now, I am about to lose my wife also. Let me end this miserable life." So saying he threw himself into the sea.

The sea god heard his cry and took pity on him. He did not allow Madhua to die. He sent a big wave which lifted him up and cast him on the sandy beach. Madhua was senseless. The sea god caused a cool breeze to blow and fan him back to life. Slowly Madhua opened his eyes. He saw a tall, handsome, blue figure standing before him. The figure was wearing a necklace of such lovely pearls and precious stones that they shone like stars on his blue body. He was Varuna, the sea god. Varuna said, "O Madhua, be brave, do not despair. In the deep oceans, I have untold wealth. I will help you. A

small gift from me can change your life. Here, take this conch-shell. Ask it what you want. It will give you whatever you desire."

It was a beautiful conch-shell. Madhua's heart was filled with thankfulness and he humbly bowed before the god. When he looked up the blue figure had vanished. Madhua was alone on the seashore with the conch-shell in his hands. He hastened home joyfully. As soon as he reached home, he wanted to try the magic powers of the conch-shell. "Oh conch-shell, give me now a hundred gold pieces," he asked. To his surprise, he found a hundred gold pieces lying on the floor! With the gold, Madhua got the best physician of the land and the best medicines for his wife. His wife soon recovered from her illness.

They had now plenty of money. With the help of the conch-shell they got a beautiful house in place of their hut. They no longer wore rags. They dressed themselves in fine clothes, ate good food and were attended upon by many servants.

Though Madhua was a simpleton, he was a kind-hearted man. Now that he was rich, he was able to give alms to the poor. No beggar ever returned empty-handed from his door.

The King of the land came to know of Madhua's sudden good fortune. He became jealous and sent spies to find out how Madhua had become rich overnight. The spies became friendly with Madhua, and soon found out from the simple man how he had become rich so suddenly. At the end, they stole the conch-shell from him and gave it to the King.

Once more Madhua was in distress. His conch-shell was gone. His wealth also slowly dwindled. He

could not give alms to the poor any more. He was sad and wished to end his life.

Madhua went to the seashore again to drown himself in the sea. The sea god once again appeared before him and said, "Do not lose heart. I shall give you a bigger conch-shell this time. It will give ten times more of everything that you ask. But do not keep it for yourself. Make a gift of it to the King and ask him to return your conch-shell. When you get back your conch-shell you should leave the country at once."

Madhua did as he was told. He was not tempted to keep the big conch-shell for himself. Faithfully, he presented it to the King and explained to him its magical powers. The King was happy to get a conch-shell which could give him ten times more of what he asked for. He gladly parted with the small conch-shell.

As soon as he was alone, the King took the big conch-shell and asked him to give him gold, silver and precious stones. But to his horror, out came two blue hands from the conch-shell and slapped him right and left. A voice from within said, "O greedy King, you have so much wealth, yet you robbed poor Madhua. Be content with what you have. If you ask for more, you will only get more blows."

The King was angry with Madhua for deceiving him. He sent his soldiers to get hold of Madhua and bring him. But Madhua had already left for a far country and was out of reach of the King's hands.

Madhua and his wife lived happily the rest of their lives. The conch-shell gift of God was their support.



## 9

## THE MAHAJAN'S SONS

ONCE there was a *Mahajan*<sup>1</sup> who had four sons. In his lifetime he had amassed a good deal of wealth. His sons and their wives lived with him under the same roof. The old *Mahajan* feared that after his death his sons might quarrel and divide the property among themselves. If they could live together, he was sure, they would prosper.

The *Mahajan* was old and weak and he did not think that he was going to live much longer. So one day he called his sons together and said, "Dear sons, my death is not far off. After I leave this world do not quarrel, do not divide the property but live together and you will prosper. If, however, a division becomes necessary at any time, go to your uncle. He is wise and just and a good friend of the family. He will make a fair and just division of the property."

Not long after, the old man breathed his last. For some time all went well with the brothers. They remembered their father's last words and lived together, each attending to his work diligently. Sadhu, the eldest brother, was a learned man who earned a good income. The second brother, Radhu, was well-versed in legal matters and many sought his advice. He too had a good earning. The other two brothers, Madhu and Bidhu, were farmers who cultivated the land belonging to the family. They worked in the fields from morning till evening, whereas the elder brothers led an easy life.

The wives of Madhu and Bidhu sometimes complained about their hard lot. "Why should you

1. Businessman.

do all the hard work and return home late every day from the fields? Your brothers also have a share in the land but they do not help you in the cultivation. They lead a comfortable life. Why not we divide the property and live separately?" they said to their husbands.

At first their husbands took no notice of their complaint. But in course of time, they too felt that what their wives said was not untrue. One day they told the two elder brothers, "We have been toiling hard cultivating all the land. This is unfair. We no longer wish to till your share of the land," and they declared, "let us make a division of the property." Sadhu and Radhu were grieved to hear this. "All right," they replied, "if we must separate, then let us not forget father's last wish. Let us go to uncle and ask him to make the division for us."

The four brothers went to see their uncle about this. Seeing them from a distance, he understood their purpose. When they reached his home and bowed to him, he said, "Welcome my nephews. I know why you have come. In a dream last night I was informed of your visit and its reason. But I do not wish to go into the matter just now. First refresh yourselves after the long journey." So saying, he brought water for them to wash their dusty feet and spread a mat on his verandah for them to sit. Then he set food and water before them. When they were refreshed, he said, "I know you have come to ask me to divide your property. Is it not so? I am willing to do it for you, but before I do it, I have been commanded in the dream to take you and your wives to Purushot-tam<sup>1</sup> for a *darshan*<sup>2</sup> of Lord Jagannath<sup>3</sup>. Before

1. Another name for Puri, a holy city in Orissa.

2. To see and worship the god.

3. The name means 'lord of the world'. The image of Jagannath is enshrined in the famous temple of Puri.

we undertake this important work, we should have the God's blessings, as is our custom."

To this, they all agreed and set out on a pilgrimage to Purushottam. Having had *darshan* and worship, they started off on their way back home. They had been walking since morning. The day grew warm and they were tired and hungry. Their uncle said, "Let us halt here and take some food before we go further. Let some of you go to the village nearby and buy some food." But when they looked for the money bag, it was not to be found. They searched and searched but the money bag was nowhere to be seen and they were in great distress. They wondered how they could get back home without money to buy food.

At last the uncle spoke, "My nephews, there is no way out but to earn money to buy food. Now, each of you go and find work to earn money. Bring your wages, either in kind or in cash."

Accordingly, they set out in search of work, each taking a different road. As Bidhu, the youngest brother, was going along, he saw a man ploughing a field. He noticed that the man was having difficulty with the bullocks. The animals were untrained and the poor farmer had ploughed little although the day was far spent. He was at his wit's end. Bidhu asked, "Can I help you? I can plough the entire field in a couple of hours! If I do, what will you pay me?" The farmer's face brightened up. He said, "I shall give you five seers of rice grains and some vegetables." 'This', thought Bidhu, 'would be ample for their mid-day meal', and he readily agreed. "That will do. Now, you hurry up and fetch the rice and the vegetables, while I plough your field," he said. After a while when the farmer returned, the Mahajan's son had finished ploughing and was

resting under a tree, wiping the sweat off his face. He received the provisions as his wage and hurried back to the camp.

On his way, Madhu, the third brother, met a group of people discussing something near a paddy field. On enquiry, they told him that they had a plot of land which always remained water-logged. Paddy would not grow on it. All their attempts to drain off water had failed and the land remained idle. Yet they had to pay taxes to the King. Madhu offered, "If I tell you how paddy could be grown in that field, what reward will you give me?" They said, "We shall give you ten pieces of silver." Then he told them the secret of growing paddy in a water-logged field. "Make balls of cow-dung and earth mixed together. When they are still wet and soft, put in a few seeds in each of them. After they are dry, cast them into the field. The balls with seeds inside will sink into the water, and the seeds will sprout," he advised. The men were thankful to him for his advice and they gladly paid him the money. With his earning, Madhu hastened back to the camp.

Now, Radhu, the second brother, in his search for work came across a man sitting under a tree, looking very sad and dejected. From his clothes, Radhu judged that he must be a respectable man. He asked him the cause of his sorrow. The man told him his sad story, "We are four brothers. When our father died, we divided the property. Each of us got equal share. However, there was one black cat which could not be divided. At last it was decided that the cat would belong to all, but each brother would be owner of only one of its legs. To my bad luck, one day the cat fell from the roof and broke the leg which had fallen to my share. So it was my duty to tend the wounded leg. I dipped a piece of cloth in oil and bandaged the wound. You know how cats are fond of warmth. While it was sleeping

near the hearth, the oily cloth caught fire. The cat got scared and ran to the hay stack. The hay caught fire and from there the fire quickly spread and burnt down many houses nearby." The man continued, "The neighbours put the whole blame on me. They took up the matter to the village Panchayat<sup>1</sup> and it was decided by the Panchayat that because the cat's wounded leg, which belonged to me, did all the havoc, I should pay damages. From where am I to get all the money needed to rebuild their houses? How can I escape from this?" he sighed.

This was too simple a matter for Radhu, the lawyer. He asked, "If I get you out of this scrape, what reward will you give me?" "Oh, if you can really do that for me, I shall give you five hundred pieces of silver," said the man with great relief. Radhu agreed and said, "Go and call your neighbours and the elders of the village. I am coming after you."

When Radhu reached the village, they were all waiting for him. On the stone platform, under the spreading banyan tree, the village elders had gathered. This was the place where the village Panchayat usually met to settle disputes among the villagers. Radhu sat beside them. The villagers told him their complaint. Radhu listened patiently and when they had finished, he said, "As you all say, it is true that the cat caused all the damage. It is also true that the bandage on its wounded leg first caught fire. Because the cat ran, the fire spread and your houses were burnt down. But don't you see that the cat could not run on its wounded leg? It is the other three good legs which enabled it to run. So, now let the Panchayat judge which of the legs caused the fire to spread. Certainly not the wounded leg!" Everyone present nodded his head in assent and wondered at his wisdom. Madhu continued, "It is now quite

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1. Village council of elders usually five in number.

clear that the cat's three good legs spread the fire. Therefore, the owners of the three good legs are guilty. It is they who should pay the damages." The Panchayat was fully convinced by Radhu's argument and decided that the owners of the three good legs should pay the damages. The owner of the wounded leg was greatly relieved and his joy knew no bounds. He gladly paid Radhu the promised five hundred pieces of silver. Radhu returned to the camp with the money.

In his search for work, Sadhu, the eldest brother, came across a house from where came the sound of weeping. On enquiry, he found that the king's minister lived in that house. The minister was in great distress as he was in danger of losing his life. The king had asked him to find out the weight of his elephant. The minister was told that if he could not give the answer by the following morning, he would lose his head. He was at a loss and did not know how to weigh the elephant. He was sure that he would be put to death the next day. Hence the minister and his relatives were sorrowful and were weeping. Sadhu



went to the minister and asked him, "If I find out for you the weight of the elephant, what reward will you give me?" The minister cheered up and replied, "I shall give you a thousand pieces of gold."

Sadhu took the elephant to the riverside. He then got the elephant to a boat, which sank deep due to the weight of the elephant. Thereupon, Sadhu marked the boat up to which it had sunk in the water. Then he had the elephant taken out of the boat and asked the men to fill the boat this time with sand until the boat sank into the water upto the mark he had made. After this it was quite simple to find out the weight of the animal. He got the sand weighed on scales and found that the weight was one hundred maunds. "That," he said, "is also the weight of the elephant." Everyone marvelled at his wisdom. The minister was grateful to Sadhu for saving his life. He not only gave him the thousand pieces of gold but also showered on him valuable gifts.

After all the brothers returned to the camp with their day's earnings, the uncle called them and their wives together. He spread out the earnings of each brother and told the two younger brothers and their wives, "Now, you see for yourselves the difference in the work and the earnings of the brothers. Do you still want me to divide the property?" he asked. The younger brothers and their wives realized their mistake. They were ashamed and they said, "We do not any more want the division of the property. We shall be content to live together."

The uncle then took out the missing money bag. He told them, "I purposely hid it and said it was lost because I wanted you to see for yourselves how much more your elder brothers could earn with their wisdom."



## NOTHING IS LOST IF GOD SAVES

EVERY year in the month of *Kartik*, on the day of the full moon, a fair is held on the bank of the Mahanadi at Cuttack. The fair is known as the *Balijatra*. This fair is very popular and it attracts large crowds of people to the river-bank. The most beautiful part of the festival is the floating of colourful toy boats in the river. On that day, early in the morning, when it is still dark, both young and old go to the riverside for bath. After the bath, they light lamps in the little boats and float them down the river. Hundreds of these little lighted boats floating on the river make a great show. It is believed that this festival of *Balijatra* is held in remembrance of the ancient days when, in the month of *Kartik*, merchants of Orissa used to set sail to distant islands for trade and commerce. It brings to mind the prosperous days when the sea-faring people brought much wealth to the land.<sup>1</sup>

In those far off days, there once lived a Sadhava<sup>2</sup> who carried on a flourishing trade with distant countries. He was a good man and was noted for his piety. At that time, Orissa was famous for her fine linen and brasswares which were popular and much in demand in distant lands. Expert weavers wove a kind of linen which was of such fineness that the whole length of a sari could be made to pass through a bamboo pipe.

This enterprising Sadhava had collected and loaded his ship with fine linen, brass and silver wares, ivory and other costly articles and he was looking forward to a successful voyage. In the month of

1. It is a historic fact that merchandise boats from Orissa used to visit Bali, Sumatra, Java etc. *Balijatra* means the journey to Bali.

2. Merchant engaged in overseas trade.

*Kartik*, one fine day, he set sail with his merchandise. The wind was favourable and carried his ship far into the ocean. But the ship had not gone far on her course, when suddenly a violent storm swept down upon them. The wind blew fiercely. The angry waves rose high and tossed the ship about helplessly on the wild sea. Her planks were strained and soon she began to leak. The sailors did their best to lighten her by throwing off some of the cargo, but soon it became evident that the ship was sinking.

To escape death, the Sadhava and his men leaped from the deck before the ship sank into the sea. Soon they were separated and were floating on the high sea. What became of his men, the Sadhava never knew. With the help of a plank, he swam towards the far off sandy shore. Sometime later, he was happy to find his servant, Bajia, swimming towards him. When they came close together, Bajia cried out, "Alas, my master, all is lost, all is lost."

But the Sadhava, who always hoped for the best, replied, "Do not say so. Do you not see that we are still alive ? Nothing is lost if God saves our lives."

They floated the whole night in the water. In the dark, a fish attacked the Sadhava and destroyed his eyes. When morning came, the servant looked up and was struck with horror to see his master's eyes gone and blood streaming from the wounds. Bajia cried out again, "Alas, my master, all is lost, all is lost."

Though the Sadhava was blind and in great pain, he said to his servant, "Do not say so. I am still alive though blind. Remember, if God saves your life, nothing is lost."

At long last, both master and servant landed on the sandy shore. The Sadhava took out a diamond ring from his finger and handing it to his servant said,

"Take this. Go and sell it in the town. It is worth a thousand gold pieces. Buy some food for us. Later we can buy a small craft and return home."

Bajia went with the ring but did not come back. The diamond was of such value that he was tempted to run away with it, leaving his blind master to his fate.

Blind and penniless, the Sadhava waited for Bajia in vain. Some people passing by took pity on the blind man and took him to the King's palace. When the king heard all that had happened to him, he felt sorry for the poor man and asked him to stay in the palace. The Sadhava thought for a while and then said, "I will gladly stay in the palace, Oh King, but on one condition that you will take my advice before you do anything important."

The King was amused at his reply. He wondered, 'There must be some worth in his words or else he dare not make such a request,' and he readily agreed. He instructed his servants to make arrangements for the Sadhava to stay comfortably.

One day, a diamond merchant came to the palace. The King bought from the merchant a beautiful ring with two glittering diamonds set on it. He somehow forgot to consult the Sadhava before buying the ring. The Sadhava felt hurt when he came to know of this. He told the King, "I should have been consulted before the ring was bought. You did not keep your promise. I, therefore, do not wish to stay here any longer."

The king smiled and ordered one of his attendants to fetch the ring. "Well, well, I am sorry, I forgot to ask your advice. Here is the ring. Test the diamonds and tell me if they are good."

The blind Sadhava felt the diamonds with his fingers. He looked agitated. "The diamonds are unlucky. They will bring evil. Have them cut in two, at once, Oh King," he urged.

When the diamonds were pierced, two evil looking insects came out of them. "Quickly take away the insects from here. Throw them in the forest and see what happens," the Sadhava advised. No sooner were the insects thrown in the forest than the whole forest caught fire.

The Sadhava said, "If the king had kept the diamonds intact, the whole palace would have been destroyed by fire tonight." It was then that the king realised the worth of the Sadhava.

The king was thankful to the Sadhava for saving his life and property. In gratitude, he bestowed much wealth upon him and built for him a beautiful house to live in. Thereafter, the king never forgot to take his advice in all matters. The Sadhava settled in the king's land and lived happily.

Many days later, there came a beggar to the house of the Sadhava asking for alms. Recognising the beggar's voice, the Sadhava asked, "Surely, you are Bajia, my servant. Are you not? How is it that you are now a beggar?"

Bajia was taken by surprise. He never thought that his master would be still alive. He was now frightened because he was recognised and was sure that he would be punished. He fell at his master's feet and begged forgiveness for his past misdeed. But the kind-hearted Sadhava said to him, "Have no fear. I have forgiven you. Look how God has blessed me. Remember, 'Nothing is lost when God saves'."



# 11

## A NOBLE SACRIFICE

IT is hard to realize what a real famine is. There are many tales describing the horrors of the great famine which raged in Orissa a hundred years ago.

For three years together there was no rain. The wells, the brooks and even the rivers dried up. The ground was barren and dry and everywhere the crops failed. There was no sowing, no reaping. Rice became a luxury and men began to forget what it tasted like. Plants, too, were nowhere to be seen. Men started eating grass and the leaves of the trees and soon even they became scarce.

As the days and the months passed, the stocks of rice and grains, which the rich people had carefully hidden, were also used up. After a while they could only have a little gruel, hardly enough for them and their children. Even this could not be had daily. Men died of hunger. The cry of pain and suffering was heard everywhere. Many took to begging and beggars were seen in every village and town.

Hunger and want drove men to behave like animals. Husbands left their wives, parents forgot natural affection, and greedily ate away the little food they could get, without giving any to their children. Men did not hesitate to kill one another for a morsel of rice. Houses of rich people were attacked and their stocks of rice plundered. Whenever it was known that food was being cooked at any place, bands of young men armed with sticks would go and snatch away the food.

Villages were deserted, as the villagers left their homes to go to the towns in the hope of getting food.

But the towns were no better. Even there men were dying of hunger.

Yet, even in the midst of this grim picture, noble acts of sacrifice and heroism were seen.

There was a village near Kendrapara, in the district of Cuttack. There lived an old man with his wife, his son and daughter. The old man worked as a daily labourer and, even in the good old days, was hardly able to make both ends meet. When famine came, nobody engaged him, and he too, like many others, became a beggar. His wife and children also went out begging. Though they begged all day long, they could get only a morsel of rice sometimes. Some days, they could get nothing and the family lived on leaves of trees or grass boiled for their meal. Often they had to remain for days together without any food. The old man became weaker and weaker, till he fell ill and died of starvation. His wife and daughter became too weak to go out for alms. His son, Sanatan, who still had a little strength left in him, now felt that it was his duty to provide food to his mother and sister. Every day he went round the village to beg. What little he brought home, he shared with his mother and sister. Often he would return home empty-handed. The village folk who had no food for themselves could offer none to Sanatan. He then went to far-off villages to beg for food.

One day, he went about begging from village to village, but got nothing. Yet he walked on and on. He was too weak to move his limbs but the thought of his starving mother and sister gave him strength and he kept on. After two days of wandering in search of food, he came to the house of a well-to-do woman. The kindly woman, seeing his shrunken body, took pity on him. "Son," she said, "I can't give you enough rice to fill your stomach, but take

and eat just this much." Sanatan carefully spread his cloth on the ground and the kind-hearted woman put some cooked rice on it. "Eat my son," she said. But Sanatan tying it up in a bundle replied, "How can I eat this ? My mother and sister have had no food for two days. I will take this home."

He had a long way to go. He felt tired, weak and hungry. He walked some distance and rested a little, then walked again until he could walk no further, and he rested in the shade of a banyan tree with the precious rice near his head.

'Let me sleep a little,' he said to himself, 'then I may be able to walk home to my mother and sister. Oh, how hungry they must be!'

He laid himself down. His weary eyes closed. Soon he fell fast asleep but that was his last sleep. Hunger had done its cruel work.

Some time later, people who passed that way were surprised to see the boy dead even though he had food with him.

"How could it be," they asked, "that the boy died when he had rice to eat? People are dying of hunger but this boy is dead with food by his side!"

This was a great surprise to them. But how could they look into the heart of the dead child which held more love for his mother and sister than for himself?



# 12

## HOW KASIA MET KAPILA

KAPILA was a *Kshatriya*. He was quite a child when his parents died. When he grew up, he went to work in a rich man's house. The rich man had a large herd of cattle and Kapila was engaged to look after them. The man had a son named Kasia. Naturally, the two boys being of the same age, were drawn towards each other. They spent much time together, played together and, indeed, a deep friendship grew up between them. Kasia often went along with Kapila to look after the cattle.

One morning, the two friends went to the field with the cattle. It was hot and a wild wind was blowing. When mid-day approached, Kapila could stand the heat no longer. Calling his friend, he said, "Kasia, I feel drowsy. I will lie down under this tree and have a nap. Don't go away, but keep an eye on the cattle until I wake up and in the evening, we will together go back home."

Kapila was soon fast asleep and the hot sun was upon his face. But he was too tired and remained asleep. While he slept, a cobra came from the jungle nearby and spreading its hood over Kapila's head, sheltered him from the sun's rays.

When Kasia came to wake up his friend, to his horror, he saw the dreadful sight. He could do nothing but stand and tremble. The snake getting the scent of Kasia's presence quietly went away.

Now Kasia got courage and running up to his friend, woke him up. Even before Kapila was fully awake, Kasia excitedly said, "Oh my friend, what a danger you escaped from! Do you know, a cobra

was here and had spread its hood over your head while you were asleep? How lucky you are! The snake did not do any harm."

The news of this strange incident spread like wild fire in their village. Many people said many things. Some old men gravely shook their heads, and said, "This is most auspicious for Kapila. It just means royalty. One day Kapila will be a king. Whoever heard a snake protecting a sleeper from the heat of the sun? This is not something which commonly happens." Everybody believed that Kapila would one day be a king.

Once Kasia asked Kapila, "Will you forget me when you become a king? Don't laugh, everybody says you will be a king one day."

Kapila affectionately replied, "How can I forget you, my friend? When I become king, I will make you a minister."

Kapila often wondered whether he would really become a king. By and by he lost interest in his work as a cowherd. Not long after this he left Kasia's house and secretly went to Puri. At Puri, he wandered near the temple and lived on the charity of the pilgrims.

At that time Bhanudeva was the King of Orissa. One day, as he was going round the temple, his eyes fell upon Kapila. Kapila was good-looking, well-built and the King took a fancy to the boy.

"Who are you and what are you doing here, young man?" he asked.

"I am a poor *Kshatriya* boy," Kapila replied, "and looking for work somewhere."

The King was pleased with this answer. "Do you like to work in the palace?" he asked.

Soon Kapila became the King's personal servant. His gentle manners, keen intelligence and hard work soon made him the King's favourite. King Bhanudeva had no son and he loved Kapila as his own son.

'Why not I adopt him as my son?' he thought to himself. As Kings' thoughts do not take time to turn into action, Kapila was soon adopted as the King's son.

Kapila was carefully educated. Besides books, he also learnt the art of war and soon became the captain of the army. He even won some battles for the King. He thus quickly rose in popularity.

In his last days, King Bhanudeva called his minister and said, "You all know I've adopted Kapila as my son. It is my desire that after my death he should be the King."

Thus, Kapila, the cowherd boy, over whose head the snake had once spread its hood, become king at last and came to be known as Kapilendra Deva.

Kasia, the old friend of Kapila, heard this great news. But Kasia was still a cowherd. He remembered the promise of Kapila. Many were doubts as to whether Kapila would keep his word. Now that he was king, whether he would even know him. But his faith in his friend made him decide to go to Puri and meet Kapila. He said to himself, 'I will go to him and see if he keeps his word.'

Having come to Puri, Kasia found that it was not easy to enter the King's palace. The gate-keeper would not let him in. Kasia made many attempts to

enter the palace and meet his old friend. But who would believe the story of his boyhood days and friendship with the King?

Kasia said to himself, 'But I must see the King by hook or by crook. Only if I can meet him, all shall be well.'

That evening he sat for a long time musing on a plan. At night, like a thief, he scaled over the palace wall. Of course, he was quickly caught and produced before the King the next morning.

"What have you to say for yourself, you wretched thief?" asked the King who could not recognise Kasia.

Kasia stared at Kapila, "Oh King, do you not recognise your old friend, the cowherd Kasia? Perhaps, you will know me if I tell you of the snake with its hood over your head sheltering you from the mid-day sun. I am the same Kasia, your boyhood friend. Often I came to your palace gate and begged to be let in. I was refused by your palace guards. Then I decided that I could meet you only if I entered the palace as a thief."

From his royal throne the King came down, embraced Kasia and received him with great honour. The next day Kasia was appointed as one of the King's ministers and his chief adviser.

This was how Kapila made good his promise to his old friend Kasia.



**A LAZY BRAHMAN AND WHAT  
HAPPENED TO HIM**

**L**ONG, long ago there lived a Brahman who was very poor. He earned his living by begging from door to door and supported himself and his old mother with the alms he received daily.

One day after wandering from place to place, to his bad luck, he did not get even a handful of rice. That day he said to himself, 'Let me not return home today with the empty bowl.'

So he took a different path away from home. As he walked along, he came across a lake with crystal-clear water. Now the Brahman was very hungry. When he saw the lake, he thought to himself, 'Let me, at least, quench my thirst by drinking some water here.'

He sat on a stone on the edge of the water. He stepped down, cupped his hands and raised a handful of water to his mouth. The thought of food was uppermost in his mind, and now with each handful of water he imagined he was eating food. He raised one handful to his mouth and said aloud, "Now, this is rice." With the next handful he said, "This is curry." Thus he mentioned names of different dishes and went on drinking.

It was believed, that in that lake there lived Mother Ganga. She heard his piteous words. She could not bear to see the Brahman suffering so much from hunger. Nothing was impossible to her because she was a goddess. She took note of all the items of food mentioned by the Brahman. These different dishes she put in cups of lotus leaves. Arranging the

cups inside an earthen pot, she pushed the pot on the water towards the Brahman. To his surprise, the Brahman suddenly found an earthen pot floating towards him. He pulled it, and lifted the lid and, to his great joy, saw delicious dishes inside. The pot was filled with fine rice cooked in ghee, fish cooked with mustard and garlic, rice-pudding and a variety of sweets. This was, indeed, a dream to the hungry Brahman. He looked around to see who was the kind giver. But not seeing anybody he felt sure that it was the hand of the Goddess who provided the delicacies. He lost no time in greedily swallowing as much as he could eat. Much was still left, and this he carried home for his mother.

The mother had gone out at that time. On returning home, she found her son fast asleep with a full stomach. In the room, she got the smell of good food and saw an earthen pot hanging from the beam on a rope bag. She promptly took it out and found all the delicacies inside. From the backyard, she cut out a banana leaf and spreading the different kinds of



food on it, she ate the best meal she ever had in her life.

Soon the son awoke from his sleep and narrated to his mother, in detail, the story of their good fortune. Mother and son were most happy and decided that this way of getting food was the simplest and the easiest. Thereafter, the son did not go out begging, but daily went to the lake and repeated the same formula. The same result followed. Daily the pot of food came to him without fail.

For a long time, this continued. Of course, the Brahman and his mother became well-fed and became more lazy than ever. The Goddess not wanting to encourage laziness, decided to stop this. Next day, the Brahman went to the lake and repeated the formula. The pot came as usual. But when he took off the lid, instead of the dishes, he found something else. The pot had been packed full with blows and kicks. As the lid was lifted, the blows and the kicks fell upon the Brahman one after another. This went on till he groaned in pain. Only when he put back the lid, did the blows stop.

Then, a mischievous idea struck the Brahman, 'Why should not my mother also share this?' asked the Brahman to himself. He carried the pot home, and hung it as before from the beam. His mother returning home, quickly took out the pot to enjoy the good food. But to her horror, instead of the flavour of the dishes, out jumped the blows and the kicks and fell upon the woman on all sides. Promptly, she put the lid back on the pot and carried it to the back-yard.

Not far from her house there lived a rich '*Mahajan*'! That night thieves broke into the

*Mahajan's* house and stole much gold and silver. These, they carried and came to the Brahman's back-yard to divide the valuables among themselves. One of the thieves noticed the pot, and being curious, opened the lid. Sure enough, heavy blows and kicks rained upon the group of thieves. They were taken by surprise and did not know where the blows came from. In their panic, they ran away leaving behind the booty. As the pot remained open, the blows and the kicks followed after the thieves.

Early next morning, the Brahman and his mother were amazed to find the valuables scattered in the back-yard. With the treasure they lived happily ever afterwards. But the lesson of the Goddess was not lost upon them. They gave up laziness and engaged themselves in useful work.



# 14

## WHAT GOD ALLOWS IS FOR MAN'S GOOD

ONCE there lived a king whose minister was a pious man. The minister often made pilgrimages to holy places, and arranged *kirtans*<sup>1</sup> and *palas*<sup>2</sup> for the benefit of the people. He even gave away half of his salary in charity. He had great faith in God and believed that God is the Protector and Preserver of all. He is the Father of all men and all are His children. Whatever God does is for the good of man. Man often does not understand His ways. But sometimes, God shows how an evil can turn out to be good. Even in times of sorrow, the minister would, therefore, say, "What God allows is for man's good."

It was summer time—the season for mangoes. The King was very fond of this delicious fruit. One day, while cutting a mango, he accidentally cut off his little finger. When news of this mishap reached the minister's ears, he went to the palace to see the King. He expressed sympathy and said, "Do not be troubled, Oh King. What God has allowed to happen is for your good."

The King was mighty enraged at his words. He thought, 'How dare my minister speak such unkind words to me! How can the loss of a finger be of any good to any one? He does not understand my pain. Well, I must teach this minister a lesson some day.' However, the King did not say anything aloud, neither did he forget the unkind words of the minister.

One day the King invited his minister to go out hunting with him. As they went along in the forest,

1. Group singing of religious songs.  
2. Acting of religious stories.

the King saw an old well. Thick bushes and creepers had almost hidden it from sight. The King pretended to be thirsty. He asked the minister, "Is the well very deep ? See, if there is any water in it."

At once, the good man bent down to look into the well. Quickly the King gave the signal to his men to push the minister into the well. When the good man was thrown into the well, the King looked down at him and sneered: "Let us see if your God can save you. If not, what has happened to you is for your good and you should be content with your lot. Ha, ha, ha." The King then left the place with his followers.

Not long after this, they spotted a stag and gave chase to it. They followed the animal deeper and deeper into the forest. All of a sudden, there came out of a grove, 'Savaras'<sup>1</sup> yelling wildly after them. The Savaras were armed with bows and arrows. They wore head-dresses of feathers of many colours. Beads of coral hung about their necks and their bodies were tattooed from head to foot. They looked so fearful that the King and his men turned and fled. The King, however, could not run as fast as his followers. Soon he was caught by the Savaras. He was bound and carried by them to be sacrificed before their goddess, Chandi.

As was the custom among the Savaras, the victim had to be bathed and prepared before he was offered in sacrifice. So the King's body was anointed with turmeric paste. Vermilion marks were put on his neck and forehead. A garland of red hibiscus was placed round his neck. After these were done, they examined the victim to see if there were any blemishes, because the victim for the sacrifice should be perfect

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1. An aboriginal tribe of Orissa. The Savaras are great hunters.

in body. While examining, they found that the King was without a finger. The Savaras were disappointed and they said to each other, "We cannot offer this man with a blemish to the Goddess. She will not accept the sacrifice and her wrath will be upon us." Therefore, they set the King free. It was then that the King understood how the loss of his finger had saved his life. He fully grasped the truth of the minister's words, 'What God has allowed to happen is for your good.'

The king returned to the palace and at once sent his men to take the minister out of the well and bring him to the palace. As soon as the minister arrived, the King narrated to him how the loss of his finger had saved his life from certain death. "How truly you said, 'What God allows is for man's good'. I did not understand your words then and treated you so cruelly. Please forgive me," said the King.

The minister was greatly touched and replied, "Oh King, do you not see God's hand in our lives? You have done no wrong by casting me into the well. That has saved my life too. God has not only saved you but also saved me from the hands of the Savaras. If you had not thrown me into that well, the Savaras would surely have taken me and offered me in sacrifice, for I have no defect in my body." He further added, "Everything that God allows is for our good."



# 15

## WHY THE MISER LOST HIS WEALTH

GOPI SAHU was a rich money-lender, who owned much landed property. He was a miser who loved money more than anything else in life. He was ever eager to receive but never willing to part with even a paisa.

Gopi had a number of labourers working in his fields. He was a cruel taskmaster, who exacted work from the labourers but grudged paying them their due wages. Sometimes, he would put off payments for days together. The poor village folk suffered much on this account.

Sura, one of his labourers, had no other means of income except the wages he earned daily. Often a whole week would pass off before he would get even a day's wage from Gopi Sahu.

The poor man's misery knew no bounds. One day, there was no food at home. At the end of the day, he went to the rich man and begged for his wages. The miser, unwilling to part with money, said, "I can't pay you today. I am very busy just now. Come to work tomorrow and I'll see about it."

Sura explained, "There is no food at home. My children have been without food since yesterday. Please give me, at least, one day's wage now, so that I can buy some rice and salt."

Gopi pretended to be busy and waving his hand at the labourer, said, "Go away, and don't trouble me." And he quickly went inside the house.

That very evening, news reached Gopi Sahu that his crops near the forest were being damaged by

wild boars. On hearing this, Gopi said to his wife, "Get ready my dinner soon. I am going out to the forest to keep watch over the crops tonight. I'll not only guard the crops, but I may also be able to kill a wild boar or two and bring home the meat."

"Don't go alone. Take someone else with you. It is not safe to be in the forest, the whole night, all by yourself," advised his wife.

"Foolish woman, you don't understand. If I take someone with me, won't he also share the meat if I kill a boar? That's why I'll go alone. Don't fear, I can take care of myself. I'll spend the night up a *mancha*<sup>1</sup>. No wild animal can attack me up there."

It was a dark night. Gopi was sitting on the *mancha* built on a huge banyan tree. The forest air was filled with the cries of the wild beasts. Suddenly, he heard a rushing sound as of many winds. The place was lighted up and he saw a strange sight.

Once a week the gods were wont to assemble at the foot of the same banyan tree with Brahma presiding, to hear reports of the three worlds—heaven, earth and the underworld. Messengers from the three regions brought reports to Brahma.

Brahma asked, "Oh messengers, what news have you brought from the three worlds?"

The messenger from heaven spoke first. "The inhabitants of heaven are happy and contented, my Lord. There is nothing special to report," he said.

1. Elevated platform used for protection and in shooting wild animals.

The messenger from the underworld reported, "My Lord, dwellers of the underworld are content with their lot and there is nothing special to report."

The messenger from the earth spoke last. He said, "All is well on earth, oh Lord, except in one village people are suffering due to the cruelty of a miser. Some are even going to lose their lives due to his hardheartedness."

"How is this? Explain," ordered Brahma.

"There is a money-lender who has acquired much wealth. He is miserly and does not regularly pay his labourers. They have not got their wages for the last seven days. One of them who has seven mouths to feed, is now in great distress. He has no money to buy food for his starving children. They will soon die if something is not done at once," replied the messenger from the earth.

Brahma's heart was touched when he heard this. At once, he ordered the messenger, "Take this bag of gold pieces. Make an opening in the roof of the poor man's hut and pour the gold through it. That will save him and his family and provide for them in plenty."

With this, the assembly of the gods came to an end. Well-hidden in the banyan tree, Gopi heard everything.

Gopi hastened home early in the morning and quickly sent for Sura, the labourer. When Sura arrived, he welcomed him warmly and said, "I am sorry I sent you away last night without paying you your wages. Now I want to give you not only your wages but also make a gift of my big house to you. I have lived here long enough. I am tired of its

luxury. Hereafter, I wish to live in a small cottage and spend the rest of my life in meditation. Here is the money for your wages. Take it and come and stay in my house with your family and I'll go and stay in yours. Let's make the exchange at once."

Sura, who had known Gopi all along as a bad pay-master, was now completely taken aback at this grand offer. He did not know what to reply and feebly said, "What will a poor man like me do with such a big house!"

"No, no, I'm serious. I truly want to make a gift of the house to you. From this moment this house is yours. Move in here with your family today before nightfall and I'll go and occupy your cottage," said Gopi.

Sura was overwhelmed at this unexpected good fortune. The change was soon made. Gopi found himself in Sura's cottage before sunset, exactly as he had planned.

Gopi was so impatient to get the bag of gold that he could not wait for Brahma's messenger to come and make a hole through the roof of the cottage. He brought a ladder, climbed up himself and carefully removed some of the thatch, thus making a big hole in the roof. Vainly, he waited the whole night looking up for the gold to come down.

The messenger, however, came with the bag of gold, but finding Sura's cottage occupied by another man, returned without dropping the gold. Thus a whole week passed, and every night the messenger came and returned with the bag of gold.

At the next assembly of the gods, Brahma asked the messenger from the earth, "Have you delivered the bag of gold to the poor labourer?"

"No, my Lord," replied the messenger. "Every time I went to the cottage with the gold, I found it occupied by the miser himself. He has exchanged houses with the labourer in the hope of getting the gold himself. Now the poor labourer lives in comfort in the miser's big house."

Brahma was happy to hear this. He said, "Now, our objective has been achieved. There is no further need to deliver the gold at the cottage."

Gopi spent many sleepless nights in the cottage vainly staring at the roof for the precious gold to arrive. But as there was no sight of the bag of gold, it struck him, at last, that the gods might have changed their plan. Again, his feeble conscience smote him and he asked himself, 'Is this my punishment for my hard-hearted treatment of those who worked under me?' He thought, 'Surely, the gods are displeased with me. I have led a selfish life all through. Now, I must do something to gain peace of mind.'

Gopi left home and went on a long pilgrimage.



# 16

## THE STORY OF RAMDHOL

THERE was a time when Orissa was divided into many princely States<sup>1</sup>. Ramdhol was the brother of a ruler of one such State. He lived in the royal palace and led a life of ease and comfort. Good food and costly clothes and companions to play with, made his days enjoyable and care free. But his happy days soon came to an end. His brother, the Raja, died suddenly. The new Raja hated Ramdhol and treated him with suspicion. He feared that Ramdhol might rise against him and attempt to dethrone him. Soon, Ramdhol's allowance was stopped. His servants left him one by one. He found it hard to make both ends meet. He and his wife were reduced to very bad straits.

At last, Ramdhol's wife, who was a sensible woman, said to her husband, "The new King does not want us here. He will starve us to death. Don't you think, it is dangerous to stay here any longer? Let us leave this place and go elsewhere. It will also be easy to work where people do not know us. So let us move over to the neighbouring State."

One dark night, they secretly left the palace. All night long they walked and before dawn, they crossed over to the neighbouring State. They kept on walking until they were very tired. As the morning advanced, the sun became too hot and finding a stream by the wayside, they stopped for rest. They were hungry and too tired to walk any further.

Just then, they heard a cry. Someone was selling puffed rice—"Puffed rice, hot and crisp". They bought

1. The feudatory States of Orissa were liquidated along with the other feudatory or princely States of India.

some. Ramdhols wife made a little bowl of lotus leaf to hold the puffed rice and placed it on the bank. They were hot and dusty and wanted to bathe before eating the puffed rice. While they were bathing in the stream, unknown to them, a snake went up to the bowl and poured its venom into it. Soon after, the king's elephant came that way and was attracted by the puffed rice. The elephant was eating it all up, when Ramdhols, finding their precious little food gone, got furious and struck the elephant with his fist. Hardly had the elephant taken a few steps before it fell down dead. The *mahout*<sup>1</sup> as well as Ramdhols were amazed at the sight. The huge animal actually died of poisoning, but they believed that it died of the blow.

'What great strength this man has!' thought the *mahout*. Let me run for life, lest I too, fall a victim to his blow.' And he ran for his life. He went to the Raja and said, "Sir, I saw a strange sight—a man so strong that with one blow, he killed your elephant."

The Raja was astonished to hear this. The loss of his elephant did not seem to worry the Raja. Instead, he became curious to see the man who could kill an elephant with one blow.

'It would be wonderful,' he thought, 'to have such a man, with such strength under my service. My enemies would be afraid of me.'

He said to his servants, "Go and bring him to me at once. Let us have him at any cost, for such a strong man in our service will be a terror to our foes."

1. Elephant-keeper.

So the Raja sent his attendants with the royal umbrella and palanquin<sup>1</sup> for Ramdhol to be brought to the palace with pomp and honour.

When Ramdhol arrived, the Raja received him with great honour and said, "We are pleased to have a warrior like you. We admire your strength and we shall be happy to have you in our service. We will make ample provision for your comfort."

Ramdhol was surprised beyond measure at the turn of fortune. He replied, "Nothing can give me greater pleasure than to be of service to you. Sir, your servant humbly accept the honour."

Thereafter, Ramdhol had nothing to worry about. He became well-known throughout the State as one who had killed an elephant with a single blow. His days passed by happily.

The two neighbouring States were often at war for their claims over some villages on the border. Sometime after Ramdhol was taken into the Raja's service, war broke out between the two States. Both sides were equal in strength. But the Raja under whom Ramdhol worked, was very confident of victory. Was not Ramdhol a warrior whom none could face? The Raja called him and said, "Ramdhol, I appoint you as the captain of my army. You will lead my soldiers to battle and, I am sure, we will win with your help."

Ramdhol was completely taken aback. He could think of no way of escape and nodded assent. He returned home and narrated everything to his wife. "I am now in a fix. With your advice I left my country and came here. Now, what am I to do? I have never

1. Covered litter carried by four men.

held a sword in my hand, never in my life have I gone to the battle-field, leave alone leading an army. If I disobey the King's order, I shall lose my life; if I go to the battle-field I shall get killed. Tell me now, what is to be done. How can I escape from this?" he asked.

His wife replied, "Be brave, have no fear. With a little commonsense and a little courage, you will succeed. I will tell you what you should do. Go, and ask the King to give you a horse which has never been harnessed. Get also a sword and a long rope. I'll tell you what to do."

Ramdhol got all that he wanted from the King. He said, "Sir, permit me to go ahead and let the army follow behind."

Next day, at dawn, Ramdhol's wife woke up, had her bath and performed *puja*. Then with sandal-wood paste, she marked her husband's forehead and prayed for victory.



Romdhol had never before sat on horseback, neither had he held a sword in his hand. His clever wife therefore set him on the horse and bound his legs to the animal. After this she handed him the sword and whipped the horse from behind. Enraged, the animal galloped at terrific speed. The soldiers marched behind the drummers. The noise of it all threw the untrained horse into panic. In wild haste, it ran towards a grove of palm trees. As the animal passed through two palm trees standing side by side, Ramdhol feared that he would be dashed to death against them. Forgetting that he was bound to the horse, Rambhol, in great fear, clutched at the trees with each of his arms. Luckily the palms were old and rotten and were easily uprooted.

Thus, Ramdhol presented a formidable sight to the enemy. He looked like Bhima, the great hero of the Mahabharata<sup>1</sup>. The very sight of a man on horseback advancing towards them, holding a palm tree in each arm, put the enemy to flight. The enemy hosts turned and fled. Ramdhol and his men pursued them and killed many.

In triumph, Ramdhol returned from the battle-field. He was given full credit for the victory. The Raja was immensely pleased with him and bestowed on him handsome rewards.



1. The great Indian Epic.

**FOUR RULES OF CONDUCT**

**I**N the village of Madhupur, far in the interior, there once lived a Brahman named Harihar. He was very poor. True, his father had left him some property. But, as is well-known, laziness is such that it would eat up anything and leave the owner in misery. Harihar was a lazy man. Bit by bit, all that he had went for sale and in the end, he and his wife had nothing to live upon.

Basanti, his wife, was a spirited woman and continuing want made her more spirited. She gave no peace to Harihar. "You sluggard, why do you want to kill your wife with hunger?"—were the words that were often heard in that little hut. Poor Harihar, what could he do? His wife's words were hard but true. For a few days, he bore it all silently. But as her misery increased, Basanti's angry words became sharper than arrows.

One morning, the lazy Harihar took courage in both hands and started off. His anger had roused him and he repeatedly said to himself, 'I will go to the wide world and try my luck.'

In his wanderings, he met a hermit. The good man had the reputation of reading the minds of men. "Oh friend," he said, "you look so miserable! What is the matter with you?" Intently he looked at Harihar's sunken cheeks and understood everything. Before Harihar had started describing his miseries, the kind-hearted hermit invited him to his *ashram*.<sup>1</sup> There the two lived together, the hermit sharing with his friend the alms he received during the day.

1. Hermitage.

In this way, days passed by. The hermit, however, could not long tolerate Harihar's laziness. His pity for the Brahman soon faded out.

"Look here, my friend," he said to the Brahman, one morning. "Laziness has no place upon this earth. If you try, you can surely make a living for yourself. Take my advice and you will never be in want. I give you four good rules of conduct. Bear these in mind and act accordingly,

'Toil like a pariah,  
Eat like a Rajah,  
Speak not the truth to womanhood,  
To the king, never tell falsehood'."

Harihar took the advice and treasured all the four tips in his memory. 'How can I ever forget these sayings?' he said to himself. 'The hermit has said that they will give me food, drink and all that I need. Wonderful words that will change my future.' Recounting in his mind these words, Harihar started off from the *ashram* and took the road to the nearest village.

As he came nearer, he saw a big crowd and coming up, saw the dead body of a man lying by the side of the road. The headman of the village seemed to be in distress. He did not know how to dispose of the dead body of a stranger.

"No one knows who the fellow was. If we can only find out the caste of this wretched corpse! No one wishes to touch it," said the headman.

"How can we perform the funeral rites of one whose caste is not known?" shouted the young men around him.

"But we cannot allow the body to be lying in the street," replied the headman.

Harihar, who heard everything, understood the situation. He remembered the first advice of the hermit—"Toil like a pariah".

He moved forward and said, "I will do the job. How much will you pay me?"

The villagers were happy at this. Soon a collection was made and the headman handed five rupees to Harihar. Harihar shouldered the dead body and alone marched off to the village cremation ground. In the usual way, he arranged the fuel and placing the dead body on the top, set fire to the wood. Quickly, flames rose up and reached the matted locks of the dead body's head. Harihar nearly fainted with excitement at what he saw. Real gold *mohurs*<sup>1</sup> fell down from the burning locks. With what joy his greedy hands grasped this treasure ! The dead man, who was a thief, had hidden the precious gold in knots in his thick hair.

Harihar became suddenly rich and he blessed the hermit a thousand times. He lost no time to go back to his wife. 'How happy she would be ! There will be plenty and no more want. Surely, my wife will dance with joy,' thought Harihar.

Wealth made Harihar discreet and shrewd. He did not squander his money. But, of course, he and his wife ate good food. Had not the hermit given him this tip as his second advice ? Harihar and Basanti lived a comfortable life. All their needs were fulfilled. They ate rich food and this attracted the envious eyes of the neighbours, who wondered at the sudden prosperity of Harihar.

1. Gold coins.

"Was not Harihar a poor man just the other day? How is it that he eats better food than any of us? Wherefrom does he get money for all this?" they asked one another. But, they could not find any clue to this mystery. Harihar had acquired not only wealth but also wisdom and he was tongue-tied.

Basanti's friend, Nilambari, felt envious at the sudden good fortune of her friend. She was determined to find out the secret.

"Come to me tomorrow morning, Nilambari, and I will tell you everything," said Basanti.

That night, Basanti with a sullen face asked her husband, "Am I not your wife? Why do you hide things from me? You never told me wherefrom you are getting money for all the good things we enjoy and the good food we eat. Do I deserve this from you?"

The hermit's third advice came to Harihar's mind—'Speak not the truth to womanhood'. The hermit's words must be acted upon. He cooked up a story and said to his wife, "Why, it is very simple. But it is a great secret. Mind, you should not utter a word about it to anyone. If one eats *Kochila*<sup>1</sup> fruit mixed with jaggery, lumps of gold will come out of his mouth. Look, I warn you, don't tell the secret to anyone."

Basanti was very happy and needless to say, Nilambari got the secret the next morning. Eagerly, Nilambari met her husband and told him everything. That same night, her husband took a heavy dose of *Kochila* mixed with jaggery. In a couple of hours, the poison started to work and the poor man

1. *Kochila* is a poisonous fruit.

groaned in pain. Nilambari stayed closed to him by the bed-side waiting for the precious metal to come out of his mouth. As death pangs came near, his pains increased and he groaned more and more. 'Surely, now the gold will come out. His stomach is aching to throw it out,' said Nilambari to herself. The poor man was dying but Nilambari's expectations were growing. After some minutes of intense struggle, his mouth widened and the last gasping breath left the poor man's body. Nilambari started up to grasp all the gold and stared at her husband for some time. The motionless head with the pain marks all over, loudly told its story and even Nilambari's clouded mind understood it. She cried, "Oh my husband. Oh my husband. Where is the gold and where are you?"

Her loud weeping soon drew a crowd around the dead man's body. The villagers who gathered round, became suspicious and one of them observed, "Why, only a few hours ago, he was as fit as he could be! With my own eyes, I saw him briskly returning from the field and now I see a dead body ! Surely, there must be something behind."

Another said, "I am certain, somebody has killed him."

"Wait a minute," said the village physician. "Don't you see his mouth? Isn't there a blue tinge in his lips?" Then looking closely at his eyes and cheeks, he gravely said, "I have no doubt that this is a case of poisoning. If I am proved wrong, I'll give half my property. The village physician's finding convinced everybody present that it was a case of poisoning.

"There can be no second opinion," said the headman of the village and stepping into the next

room, he called Nilambari and asked her, "Woman, speak the truth. This is a serious matter. Tell us what food you gave him and what he ate tonight. Mind, if you tell lies, you will be punished."

Nilambari narrated all that she had done and quickly enough she was taken to the Raja for punishment.

Sternly the Raja looked at Nilambari and said, "Why have you poisoned your husband and what did you profit thereby?"

"Oh Raja," said the weeping Nilambari. "I am an unfortunate woman. I did not kill my husband. I never thought that he would die. It all happened this way. My friend Basanti and her husband were once poor. Suddenly they became rich. I asked Basanti wherefrom they got the money. She enquired from her husband and told me, in great confidence, the secret of their sudden wealth. She said that her husband ate *Kochila* fruit mixed with jaggery and real gold came out of his mouth. I am a cursed woman. Why did I believe her? I gave *Kochila* and jaggery to my husband and he died. Now I wish I were dead too. Oh my husband," she wept aloud.

The Raja became furious and immediately sent for Harihar and his wife.

"You scoundrel, you are meant for the hangman's rope", he roared at Harihar.

Harihar knelt down before the Raja and said, "Sir, be patient and hear my story. I was a poor Brahman, daily toiling for a little food but even that did not fall to my lot. One day, I met a hermit and the learned hermit gave me four rules of conduct:

"Toil like a pariah,  
Eat like a Rajah,  
Speak not the truth to womanhood,  
To the king, never tell falsehood.'

I treasured in my mind these words of wisdom and vowed to follow them."

Then step by step, Harihar narrated how at every stage, obedience to the counsel of the hermit brought him good fortune.

"When my wife pestered me to reveal the secret of my wealth, I followed the hermit's third rule of conduct—'Speak not the truth to womanhood'. Accordingly, I told a lie to my wife. At the time, I little knew that the result would work out in death to an innocent person. Sir, I have narrated truthfully everything in obedience to the fourth rule of conduct given to me by the hermit—'To the king, never tell falsehood', " concluded Harihar.

The Raja was greatly amused at this story. He forgave Harihar and sent him away.

On the way, while returning home, the Brahman again repeated in his mind the four rules of conduct. 'Aha, how learned and all-knowing the hermit must be! Thrice blessed be my *Guru*<sup>1</sup>, who gave me such unfailing rules of conduct'. Musing these words, Harihar returned home.

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# 18

## MAN'S DESTINY IS NOT IN HIS HANDS

ONCE there was a Raja whose name was Jayadeva. He had many Pundits who attended his *durbar*. But there was one in his kingdom who was very learned but outspoken. He would not flatter any one, nor would he go to the king's *durbar* and sing his praises. The Raja was annoyed and one day, calling him, angrily said, "You think you are very learned. But who cares for your learning outside my *durbar*? Do you realize that without my favour no one will respect you?"

The proud Pundit would not be cowed down. He answered, "Sir, you are mistaken. A Pundit wherever he may be just as a Raja is a Raja wherever he goes and will receive a Raja's honour."

"What? Dare you retort like this to a Raja?" he roared and calling one of his guards ordered that the Pundit be immediately taken and kept in prison until his words were proved true, otherwise he would be put to death.

The next day, Jayadeva left his palace secretly and went out in disguise to prove the truth of the Pundit's words.

In the course of his journey he came to a jungle. There was a tree in which a bird had built its nest. A huge snake was crawling up the tree and was about to devour the young ones. Moved with pity, the Raja killed the snake and cut it to pieces with his sword.

Soon the parent birds returned to the nest with food for the young ones. Before taking the food,

the young ones chirped, "Mother, mother. What a danger we escaped from! There down below, the wicked snake is lying dead. It was about to eat us up. Even as its jaws were wide open to devour us, this kind man killed it and saved us."

The parent birds said to each other, "Let us do a good turn to this man. He has saved our little ones." The grateful birds, then said to the Raja, "Follow us, Master, and we will repay your great kindness."

They led the Raja to an *ashram*<sup>1</sup> in the jungle, where a hermit was in meditation. The Raja bowed before the hermit and prayed for a boon. The hermit handed him a twig, saying, "Take this twig. It will enable you to take any shape you wish and you can also be yourself again when you so desire."

With the magic twig in hand, Jayadeva resumed his journey and came into the territory of another Raja, by name Kesari. Raja Kesari was boastful and thought much of himself. He did not believe in God and thought that as a Raja he was all-powerful. He had a daughter, who was his opposite in nature. The princess was humble, kind-hearted and devout. She spent much time in worship and meditation. Naturally, there were frequent arguments between father and daughter, who did not agree on many things.

One day, at the end of a heated talk, the Raja declared in a fit of anger, "Look, I know not about your God. You are in my hands. I can make you a queen or a beggar just as I please."

"Certainly not, father," replied the princess. "As a Raja, you may think that you are all-powerful,

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1. Hermitage.

but please do not forget that you are merely a man and therefore subject to Destiny."

In a fit of anger, to show that he could do anything, the Raja immediately ordered that his daughter be married to a blind beggar. Cheerfully, the princess accepted her fate. She lived with her blind husband in a cottage and looked after him.

One day, to her great joy and surprise, the blind man suddenly turned into a handsome prince. The prince was no other than Raja Jayadeva, who had transformed himself, with the aid of the magic twig to the blind man.

Joyfully, Jayadeva and the princess went to Raja Kesari. There Jayadeva narrated his story. Raja Kesari was happy to meet his daughter and to know that he had actually given the princess in marriage to the handsome Raja Jayadeva, instead of to a blind beggar. He understood that his daughter was right and that man is subject to Destiny. He now declared, "Surely the destiny of man is in the hands of God. We can do nothing by ourselves."

Raja Kesari had no son of his own, so he adopted Jayadeva as his son. Thus, Jayadeva became ruler of both the kingdoms. He now realized the truth of his Pundit's words that a Raja will be a Raja wherever he may go, and that a Pundit will be honoured as a Pundit wherever he may be.

Thus, the Pundit's words proved true. Realizing the truth and the wisdom of his words, Jayadeva went back to his state, released the Pundit from prison and gave him numerous rewards.



# 19

## PUNISHMENT FOR BREAKING A VOW

**B**Ishnu was a rich merchant of Jaipur. He was hard-working and thrifty and gradually became rich and richer. Soon the story of his wealth spread far and wide, but along with his wealth his miserly habits also became widely known. All who knew him spoke of him as the Miser of Jaipur. Bishnu's mind was always on his riches, so much so that he ate as little as possible and saved as much as he could. He had no children and people wondered for whom he was amassing all the wealth. Bishnu did not understand why people talked about his riches. 'Surely, it's none of their business. What I save is my own and I am master thereof. No one need poke one's nose into my affairs,' he said to himself.

One day, while bathing in the village pond, he noticed a date palm full of ripe dates. 'Surely, I can save my lunch today if I can fill my stomach with the dates,' he thought.

Bishnu looked around to see if anyone was present and finding none, he climbed up the tree. As he stretched forth his hands to pluck the dates, the slender palm began to sway dangerously because of his weight. Bishnu was greatly frightened. 'There is nothing more precious than life,' he said to himself and he prayed, 'Oh gods, save me. If I live and get home safely, I will feed<sup>1</sup> a hundred Brahmans.'

Trembling with fear, he slowly climbed down a few steps. Then he looked at the ground which was not very far below. He got a little courage and the cost of feeding a hundred Brahmans vexed

1. A custom with the Hindus—a religious act supposed to propitiate the gods.

him. Quickly, he changed his vow. 'I will feed Brahmans all right, but not so many as a hundred. Fifty of them will do.'

Soon he came further down the palm tree and the ground looked rather close. He had no fear of death now. He became bolder this time. 'I won't die if I fall down from here. Feeding fifty Brahmins!' He thought to himself. 'Why? It would cost me such a lot! With half that money, I and my wife could live for several months. But a vow is a vow. I will not break my vow and I will feed five Brahmins.'

Quickly, he came further down and his feet almost reached the ground. 'Feeding as many as five Brahmins! What waste of money! But I will not break my vow. I will feed one Brahman only. I don't mind the cost,' he said to himself.

With a heavy heart, he came along the village path calculating how much he would have to spend to feed a Brahman. He thought, 'A Brahman eats quite a lot. How can I do it cheaply?'

But his conscience said, 'A vow is a vow. I will not break my vow,' he said to himself. 'I will feed a Brahman, surely, but I will invite one who suffers from stomach trouble and cannot eat much.'

On reaching home, he thought of Gobinda Misra, a Brahman, who was known to be suffering from colic pains frequently and Bishnu invited him to a meal one day.

On the appointed day, Bishnu had to go out on work. So he called his wife and instructed her, "The Brahman is coming today. Feed him well and give him also two or three coppers as *dakhina*.<sup>1</sup> See that he goes satisfied."

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1. Gift of money given to Brahmins.

Gobinda came all right, but he would not eat. He said, "I have colic and I can't eat I will take only my *dakhina*. I want a hundred silver coins."

"A hundred silver coins!" exclaimed Bishnu's wife, staring at the Brahman in surprise. "How can that be?"

The Brahman replied, "You see, I cannot eat and I will take only my *dakhina*. You can not refuse that to a Brahman whom you have invited. Unless you give me one hundred coins, I am not going to leave this place."

There was no escape for Bishnu's wife. Besides, she remembered her husband's words—'send the Brahman satisfied'. So, she reluctantly counted out the money and Gobinda Misra went home satisfied.

Bishnu, on his return, was shocked to learn that the Brahman had taken away as many as a hundred silver coins. He was so pained at this that he nearly fainted. However, he soon recovered from the shock. For a long time, he showered abuses upon his poor wife. The woman's only excuse was, "You wanted me to send him satisfied and he insisted upon a hundred silver coins."

The merchant soon made up his mind to go to the Brahman and recover the money. 'One hundred silver coins! One hundred silver coins! I must get back the money,' he muttered to himself. Taking his umbrella, he started for Gobinda's house.

When Gobinda saw the merchant from a distance, he quickly went inside the house and tried to play a trick on him. He rolled himself up in a mat and feigned illness. He asked his wife to sit near his feet and loudly moan over his sickness.

Accordingly, when Bishnu arrived at Gobinda's house, the latter's wife was crying loudly, "Woe unto me ! What am I to do if my husband dies ? Why did he go and eat in that miser's house ? How many times I asked him not to go there ! But, oh my fate, my cursed fate, he would not listen. What wretched food he ate there, that he suffers so ! What am I to do if he dies ? Oh, my cursed luck ! Oh, oh!"

Soon the neighbours gathered to console her. "Look at my fate," she cried again. "I will go to the Raja and tell him everything." Bishnu was frightened out of his wits when he heard these words. From the crowd came whispers, "Miser, heartless man, murderer, to treat a Brahman guest thus!"

'How am I to escape from this danger?' Bishnu asked himself. Then an idea struck him. Quietly, he went into the room, slipped his gold ring into the woman's hand, whispering in her ears, "Please, be quiet. Take this and don't cry any more." Then he left Gobinda's house as fast as his legs could carry him.

Perhaps, the miser would have spent very much less if he had kept his first vow and fed a hundred Brahmans.



MAGUNI and Gokuli were deeply attached to each other. Maguni's father was a weaver and Gokuli's father was a blacksmith, who lived next door to the weaver. Being neighbours and of the same age, Maguni and Gokuli became great friends. They played together, roamed about together and often went together fishing in the village pond. Stealing fruits from orchards was their favourite pastime. However, the bond between the boys was not love but just mischief.

When they reached school-going age, their parents put them in the village school and hoped that in due course, the boys would apply their minds to their studies. But the lads hated the school and studies. How could they catch fish in the village pond if they went to school in the morning? Catching fish was delightful, but the school was dreadful. Every morning the boys disappeared pretending that they were going to school. But they were seen during school time in others' gardens or wandering in the neighbouring wood. When their parents discovered this, it was really too late. Maguni and Gokuli often got beatings from their fathers, but no amount of punishment could change their ways.

At last, the boys felt that their fathers did not understand them. "They have no sense," said Maguni, "they don't understand such simple pleasure which boys love."

"No, they don't," rejoined Gokuli. "My father even beats me for this. I don't like being beaten every day."

"Nor do I," promptly responded Maguni. "We must do something about it."

Thereafter, the boys planned to run away from their homes. Swiftly, the plans were put into action and one morning, without anybody's knowledge, the boys left their homes. The morning air was cool and refreshing and they were happy to be free. They talked of the future. They were sure that they could manage very well and earn a living for themselves.

"Certainly," said Gokuli, "if we work, we can earn much."

"Yes," rejoined Maguni, "and without scolding and beating."

They passed through many villages and came to one, where they saw a house which had a big garden and a large cowshed. There, they asked the owner, a rich farmer, for work.

"What work can you do, my boys?" asked the farmer.

"Any work you are pleased to give us," replied the boys.

The farmer, who was in need of workers, straightway engaged them and promised to pay them well. He led the boys to the cowshed and turning to Maguni, he said, "All my cows have been taken out for grazing, except the one there in the corner. I want you to be in charge of this cow and take out it to graze every morning and bring it back in the evening. Can you do this?"

Maguni proudly answered, "Sir, I have sometimes looked after my father's cows and to manage a single cow is nothing for me."

Then the farmer led Gokuli to his garden and pointing at a mango tree, said, "I want you to water this tree. It should be so well-watered that the ground around the tree should always remain damp."

Gokuli smiled and said, "Watering a single tree is only child's play. I can do it very easily."

The next morning, the two boys started off for the day's work. Maguni went to the cowshed and loosed the cow expecting for himself an easy day and a long mid-day nap. Little did he know what troubles awaited him, for the cow was an unmanageable one and was a problem to its owner. Therefore, great was his surprise when the cow darted off like an arrow the moment it was let loose. Maguni ran after it with all his might. Soon, the cow jumped over a fence and trampled the young cucumber plants. The owner, seeing this, came out of his house. Angrily, he looked at Maguni and threatened to beat him.

The next moment the cow ran off to a banana orchard and pulling at the leaves, destroyed a number of plants. The gardener came running with a big stick and chased both the cow and Maguni. It is not easy to say whether the cow or Maguni ran faster.

But, Maguni's sorrows were not ended. The cow went to a paddy field. The watchman threw stones at the cow and abused Maguni calling him names.

Finally, late in the evening, with tired limbs and bruises all over his body, Maguni with difficulty managed to return with the cow. He was angry

with the cow, angry with himself and angry with the whole world.

'I am the unlucky one,' he said to himself. 'Gokuli must have had a grand and easy time resting in the shade of the mango tree.' An idea struck him. 'I will change places with Gokuli tomorrow. I will not tell him the nature of this wretched cow. I'll give him a happy picture of this day. Surely, he will agree to take on this job tomorrow,' thought Maguni.

Poor Gokuli ! From the deep well, he pulled water in a heavy brass pot and poured it at the foot of the mango tree. Once, twice, thrice.....ten times, but with no result. The tree did not look sufficiently watered. More and more water he poured, but in vain. The thick coir rope with which he drew water, hurt his palms. As he continued pulling potful after potful of water, blisters formed in his palms. The pain was intense, but how could he stop without finishing his job? Wearied beyond measure, his arms aching with pain and with blistered hands, Gokuli returned in the evening.

But, Gokuli was not behind Maguni in craftiness. 'I must get this job changed,' he said to himself. 'I'll tell Maguni what an easy time I had. How in a short while, I watered the tree and had a long nap in the afternoon.'

Thus, the two friends met, each with his own secret plan. First, Maguni gave a rosy picture of the great time he had with only one cow to look after. "Listen Gokuli, I'll take a *charpoy*<sup>1</sup> tomorrow and enjoy my mid day nap like a prince."

1. Light bedstead used in India,

Secretly, Gokuli envied Maguni's happy lot, but consoled himself, 'I'll sleep on that charpoy tomorrow and not Maguni!'

With glowing words, Gokuli described his own happiness. "What a grand time I had today," he said, "with nothing to do. Now, tell me Maguni, how long does it take to water a single mango tree? I poured three potfuls of water and had all the time to myself. Now I wish you could enjoy it too!"

"Wonderful. Let's change places tomorrow," suggested Maguni.

Needless to say that the crafty plans of the two friends were put into action the next day. When morning came, with a cheerful heart, Gokuli started off with the charpoy on his head. But the moment he untied the cow, the inevitable happened. Frantically, he ran with the charpoy on his head. Running behind such a cow was bad enough, but with the load of the charpoy it was still worse. With the cow fleeing before and the foul abuses behind, Gokuli ran all the day from orchard to field and field to orchard. He was a picture of misery.

Of course, Maguni fared as miserably as Gokuli, doing the impossible task of watering the mango tree.

When they returned in the evening, each was angry with the other. But was it not true that each one had deceived the other? Realizing this, they promptly forgave each other and became friends once again. Then their fertile brains worked out their future plans.

"Well, Maguni," said Gokuli, "I think there is a pit near the mango tree. I suspect some treasure

hidden in that pit. Let us dig under the tree and if I am correct, then our future is made."

In the night, after everyone was asleep, the lads went to the garden and started digging under the mango tree. Gokuli dug and Maguni took out the earth and put it away. Soon they made a wide and deep hole. Then suddenly, Gokuli's spade hit something hard. 'I think, I have hit the treasure pot,' thought Gokuli. 'If I hand over the pot to Maguni, he may run away with it, leaving me in this pit.'

"Will you come down and dig, Maguni? I am too tired to dig any more," said Gokuli.

Maguni, at once, jumped into the pit and lifted Gokuli up. As Gokuli had planned, Maguni dug out the pot and handed it to him from below. Quietly, Gokuli walked away from that place and started running with the treasure.



Poor Maguni called him from the pit, but there was no response. He could not even shout lest the farmer and his men should wake up. With great difficulty, Maguni crawled out of the pit and stood alone near the mango tree with only darkness around him. Where was his friend? Where had he gone with the treasure? Suspicion and anger worked in his mind and he ran in search of Gokuli. After a while, Maguni found Gokuli, but as both were rogues and the fact well-known to each of them, they quickly decided to let bygones be bygones.

Together, they sat by the side of a well to divide the treasure. The well was an old one and lay unused for years. Even two *neem* trees had grown inside it. Maguni thought if somehow Gokuli were got rid of, all the treasure would be his. No sooner did this thought enter his mind than he planned to get rid of the other.

"Gokuli," he said, "I wonder if there is water in the well. It looks so old and unused."

Saying that there might be water, Gokuli leaned to look into the well, when Maguni gave him a push from behind. Down went Gokuli headlong into the well and sure death would have been his fate had he not been luckily caught in the strong roots of one of the small *neem* trees inside the well. There he was stuck up and thus escaped death. The wicked Maguni merrily walked away with the treasure.

At midday, two witches came to the well and sat unseen on the other *neem* tree. They were sisters. They soon started a conversation.

"What is all the news," asked the younger witch.

"News! I am full of happiness. Have you ever seen the beautiful daughter of the Raja? Her life is

in my hands now. I have afflicted her with an incurable sickness. The Raja hopes that his daughter would recover. He has engaged the best physicians of the land. But the girl is doomed. She is sinking day by day and in three days time, she will be dead."

"What?" queried her sister. "Do you mean to say that in this wide world, there is no remedy for her sickness? What is this strange disease?"

"I alone, know the cure," replied the elder witch. "The remedy is very simple, but the Raja's foolish physicians do not know it. Only three leaves from one of these *neem* trees can work the miracle. The girl has to only smell the leaves."

Gokuli listened attentively. He was excited. He was happy beyond measure that he could do what even the Raja's physicians could not. When evening came and the witches left the place, with great effort, Gokuli crawled out of the well. With three *neem* leaves in his hand, he forthwith made for the Raja's place and boldly announced that he could cure the princess.

The Raja, who had tried all remedies in vain, gladly allowed Gokuli to treat the princess. The princess got well after Gokuli's magic treatment. There was great festivity in the palace. The Raja was beside himself with joy. Gokuli was young and good-looking and the Raja decided to give the hand of his daughter in marriage to him. A week after the recovery of the princess, the wedding was celebrated with great pomp. Gokuli became the Raja's son-in-law. A grand palace was built for him and the princess, where they lived happily.

In the meantime, Maguni, who had run away with the treasure, had prospered much by investing

it in business. His boats carried merchandise to distant lands across the seas.

Once, Maguni was shipwrecked near a seacoast and was cast ashore. Not far from where he lay unconscious, stood Gokuli's palace. The news of a man lying unconscious on the seashore, was brought to Gokuli by servants. Hastily, Gokuli came to the seashore and whom would he meet but his old friend and childhood companion, Maguni! The sight of his friend melted Gokuli's heart and this time with sincere affection, he welcomed Maguni to his home. Misfortune and suffering had chastened Maguni's heart and he had understood that evil doesn't work and its fruits are always bitter. Thus the two friends were truly reconciled this time and lived together.

Often, their talks would reach the midnight hour, when the two sat together and recalled old memories. At last they realized the value of sincerity and truth in life.



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